大型古风广播剧
狼狼狼
第三季
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杀破狼 / Sha Po Lang by Priest by NorthwestFlower

Category: Historical Fiction
Genre: historical, mecha, priest, steampunk, wars
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2018-10-14
Updated: 2020-07-09
Packaged: 2020-07-12 00:20:31
Chapters: 140
Words: 482,320
Publisher: www.wattpad.com
Summary: In the age of the Great Liang Dynasty, the lives of the people were made convenient with steam-powered machines that run on a fuel named Ziliujin. Chang Geng, who lived in a small countryside village, shared a distant relationship with his mother while his stepfather was away most of the year round, and the only people he was close to were two little kids, the village teacher, and his yi fu - adoptive father. But his life was flipped upside down one day following the barbaric Man tribes' invasion, and it turned out that his entire identity had been an illusion - not only was Chang Geng himself not the country boy he thought he was, but also his mother, his teacher, and even his beloved yi fu... (Summary taken from novelupdates) _____ Author: Priest Translator: Emi Editor: Shy Status: Completed on jjwxc Main story: 128 Chapters Extra stories: 15 Chapters Main CP: Chang Geng x Gu Yun (slow burn) Genres: Historical, Steampunk, Wars, Hurt/Comfort This story does contain sex scenes but they are NOT explicit. Please do not ask about this. Please also refrain from comparing with works or characters not related to Sha Po Lang or Priest in the comments. Keep the comments related to the novel to not clog the threads. Thanks for understanding.
Language: English
Read Count: 1,638,040

Introduction: Title Explanation

**this introduction is not part of the book, just an additional info ^^*

「 *SHA PO LANG* - 杀破狼 」 *EXPLAINED*

I would like to briefly explain the name of this work for the readers to have a better understanding of it as this title does not literally mean 'Kill the Wolf', but has a deeper meaning.

Sha Po Lang is a type of *Ziwei* - a form of Chinese ancient fortune-telling to indicate each individual's *ming gong* ＜命宫＞ - a special term that determines the "spirit", "willpower", "personality" and "emotions" inside each person. It is much more complicated than that but for this post, I'm only going to explain some of the very basic traits that are related to our story.

In Ziwei numerology, **Qi Sha** ＜七杀＞**, Tan Lang** ＜贪狼＞**, Po Jun** ＜破军＞ are the three stars/*ming gong* that make up the 'fortune' or 'fate' that is called **Sha Po Lang** ＜杀破狼＞.

Sha Po Lang represents turmoil and changes. Individuals with the Sha Po Lang ming gong are fated to be a drifter, life can swiftly change, although facing many ups and downs, they bear the potential to be heroic and become renowned. More than half of the Generals from ancient times who spent their lives on the battlefield bear this ming gong.

As we move forward in the story, we will be able to see very clearly that our two main characters' personalities and their purpose were written and built based on these traits.

Below are the advantages and info for the personality traits of each star:

—

Qi Sha: Good at communicating, rebellious, breaking through the status quo, dares to be bold, sharp-minded, likes to be independent, strong-minded, do things simply and decisively, won't be tainted,

bold, upright and selfless, self-motivated.

Strategic and possesses very good leadership skills. The success or failure of a lifetime often comes unpredictably, must survive through hardships in their youth before they could reach success.

—

Po Jun: Intelligent, hardworking, rarely want to sit still, eager to win, arrogant, adventurous, loves arts, quick to respond. Skilled in leadership, heroic.

Because of its tremendous destructive power, it is especially talented to serve as a spearhead. They are the so-called striker, the vanguard on the forefront of the battlefield, and the change seekers in their career.

In the case of combining two stars together, their personalities traits can have some slight changes:

Ziwei and *Po Jun*: Kind and powerful. Have the courage to undertake responsibilities.
Wu Qu and *Po Jun*: have a clear distinction between love and hate. Completely resolute.
Lian Zhan and *Po Jun*: have a clear distinction between right and wrong, unafraid of difficulties.

—

Tan Lang: Multi-talented, versatile and dexterous, keen and sharp, sociable and humorous, resourceful, ambitious, often supportive of the opposite sex, romantic, can show signs of arrogance at times.

Favors arts, music and such.

Tan Lang's main blessing is "*peach blossom*" - refer to individuals with a favorable path in romance and can be flirtatious.

In case of combining stars:

Lian Zhen and *Tan Lang*: smart and knowledgeable.
Zi Wei and *Tan Lang*: graceful and elegant, lively and cheerful.
Wu Qu and *Tan Lang*: creative and possess a unique style.

Some disadvantages for this star:

When in an unfavorable position, this star can create disadvantageous traits. Individuals under this position will be lonesome, would not get along with family members or relatives, would indulge in entertainment activities, would loiter and idle about.

< some pieces of information were obtained and translated from Baike Baidu >

-Emi

月若流金 (The moon resembling a stream of gold) - Lyrics Translation

Please support the audio drama if you can. Sha Po Lang audio drama is known for its high-quality production, great voice acting, and being faithful to the books. For less than $20, you could have all three seasons! ^^

A reminder to not entertain uploaded audio dramas anywhere else aside from the official websites.

Click the comments on each line for the official links for the audio drama:

• Season 1

• Season 2

• Season 3

月若流金 is the official theme song of Sha Po Lang audio drama, sang by Gu Yun. It is a very special song as it perfectly captured the essence of the book, Gu Yun's life, character, and thoughts.

Please listen, download or give the studio a like to support them. Link here.

We have spent lots of time trying to make sure the translation is correct and chose the right word to describe everything well.

月若流金
(Yue Ruo Liu Jin) - The moon resembling a stream of gold
Singer: A Jie (Gu Yun's voice actor)

[Verse 1]

笑身无长处

Xiào shēn wú cháng chù

Mocked myself for I am without merits*

**长处* *meant strong points, specialty*

唯耳目通肝胆

Wéi ěrmù tōng gāndǎn

Embracing courage through only these eyes and ears

见锦簇花繁

Jiàn jǐn cù huā fán

Have seen countless clusters of splendid flowers

也见黄沙血染

yě jiàn huáng shā xuè rǎn

Have also witnessed the golden sand dyed in blood

听锦瑟无端

tīng jǐn sè wúduān

Have heard the endless tone of the harp

还听破鼓擂桴断

Hái tīng pò gǔ léi fú duàn

Have also listened to the beat of broken war drums

过声色 踏铁马

guò shēngsè tà tiěmǎ

Leaving behind beauty and songs, mounted the armored horse

何惧不还

hé jù bù huán

What is there to fear in not returning?

恼负尽千策

Nǎo fù jǐn qiān cè

Bearing thousands of schemes

却七窍通一环

què qīqiào tōng yī huán

Yet still remained foolish

有情出肺腑

yǒuqíng chū fèifǔ

A heart filled with passion

竟与风月无关

jìng yǔ fēngyuè wúguān

Yet uncaring of romance

凭耳不能闻

píng ěr bùnéng wén

With these ears that could not hear

这眼尚也不曾看

Zhè yǎn shàngyě bùcéng kàn

And these eyes that could not see

是愚人 是痴人 随人叹

shì yúrén, shì chīrén, suí rén tàn

A foolish being, a senseless being, whatever people may exclaim

一朝盛景总始于东风送暖

Yī zhāo shèng jǐng zǒng shǐ yú dōngfēng sòng nuǎn

The flourish of a dynasty always arises with the warmth of the spring breeze

升平之世终如花向晚

shēngpíng zhī shì zhōng rúhuā xiàng wǎn

Peace and prosperity of a nation ends like a withered flower

月若流金 岁若长河 时光荏苒

Yuè ruò liú jīn suì ruò chánghé shíguāng rěnrǎn

Months resembled the flow of gold, years resembled the flow of a river, time swiftly passed by

此时沧 彼时桑 天地皆平凡

cǐ shí cāng, bǐ shí sāng, tiāndì jiē píngfán

Today's vast blue sea, tomorrow will turn into mulberry*, heaven and earth would become undistinguished

**taken from the idiom '沧海桑田 - the sea becomes mulberry fields', meaning time will bring great changes to the world*

[Hook]

曾认这一腔承千帆

Céng rèn zhè yī qiāng chéng qiānfān

Have known that my core could bear a thousand ships

衷肠无曲直 横骨自反

zhōngcháng wú qūzhí héng gǔ zì fǎn

When the heart was rid of right and wrong, the bone had known

enlightenment

借天三分胆 纵万夫敢一战

jiè tiān sān fēn dǎn zòng wàn fū gǎn yī zhàn

Borrowing from heaven three parts of courage, unleashed thousands of men to venture in battle

唯遇你 一念百转

wéi yù nǐ yīniàn bǎi zhuǎn

Meeting you made me have a change of heart

故此生 惟一心分两半

Gùcǐ shēng wéiyī xīn fēn liǎng bàn

Therefore in this life, my one heart was divided in two

从此多反复 方知温软

cóngcǐ duō fǎnfù fāng zhī wēn ruǎn

From then on, after time and time again, I have come to know warmth and gentleness

一半赠河山 换万家得长安

yībàn zèng héshān huàn wàn jiā dé cháng'ān

Given one half for the nation, in exchange for peace for thousands of families

余一半 愿君好梦正酣

yú yībàn yuàn jūn hǎo mèng zhèng hān

The remaining half, wished for you to always have beautiful dreams

[Instrumental]

[Verse 2]

人生无长乐

Rénshēng wú cháng lè

Life is not forever

便莫计较悲欢

biàn mò jìjiào bēi huān

Do not be troubled about either grief or joy

勿怪锦衣单

wùguài jǐnyī dān

Do not blame those who have only known luxury

从未觉塞上寒

cóng wèi jué sāi shàng hán

Not knowing how to cope with the cold

至得你心念

Zhì dé nǐ xīn niàn

Only until I received your affection

醍醐竟识了冷暖

tíhú jìng shìle lěngnuǎn

Did I come to understand the comfort of another

或当断 终未断 惹心乱

huò dāng duàn zhōng wèi duàn rě xīn luàn

Should have been decisive, yet ended up faltering, plunging my heart into confusion

**taken from the phrase '当断不断" - to be indecisive when a decision is needed*

未知苦处 怎信神佛懂尘寰

Wèizhī kǔchu zěn xìn shén fó dǒng chénhuán

Without knowing suffering, how could one believe in gods and Buddha*, to comprehend this mortal life

**Chapter 25, Liao Ran wrote something like this on Chang Geng's palm*

不识情重 人生如一栈

bù shí qíng chóng rénshēng rúyī zhàn

Ignorant of emotions, life would be no different than a temporary dwelling

盛世将倾 深渊在侧 我辈来担

shèngshì jiāng qīng shēnyuān zài cè wǒ bèi lái dān

The age of prosperity will soon collapse into the abyss, I will be here to shoulder it all

向此生 为之殁 万死皆无憾

xiàng cǐshēng wéi zhī mò wàn sǐ jiē wú hàn

For this life, even in ten thousands of deaths, there would be no regrets.

[Hook]

曾认这一腔承千帆

Céng rèn zhè yī qiāng chéng qiānfān

Have known that my core could bear a thousand ships

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余一半 愿君好梦正酣

yú yībàn yuàn jūn hǎo mèng zhèng hān

The remaining half, wished for you to always have beautiful dreams

愿一世 与君老生常谈

yuàn yīshì yǔ jūn lǎoshēngchángtán

Wishing that for the rest of this life, to be with you, sharing commonplace conversations

READ THIS FIRST!

Some rules for a better reading environment:

- **DON'T** ask for sex scenes. This story does contain mentions/hints of sex but they are **NOT** explicit
- **DON'T** ask for spoilers
- **DON'T** drop spoilers
- **DON'T** make comparisons to other unrelated works
- **DON'T** clog the comment thread with off topic talks
- **BE RESPECTFUL.**

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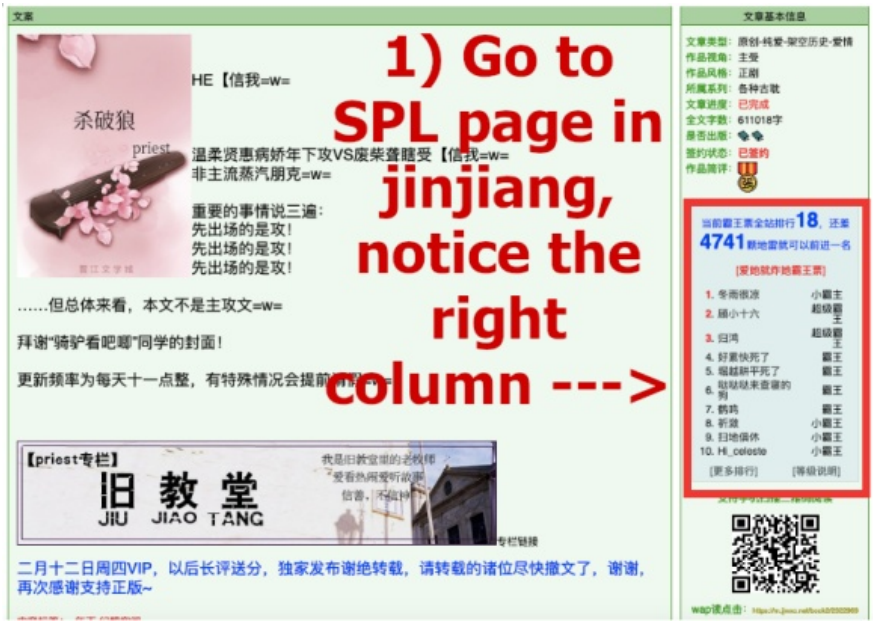
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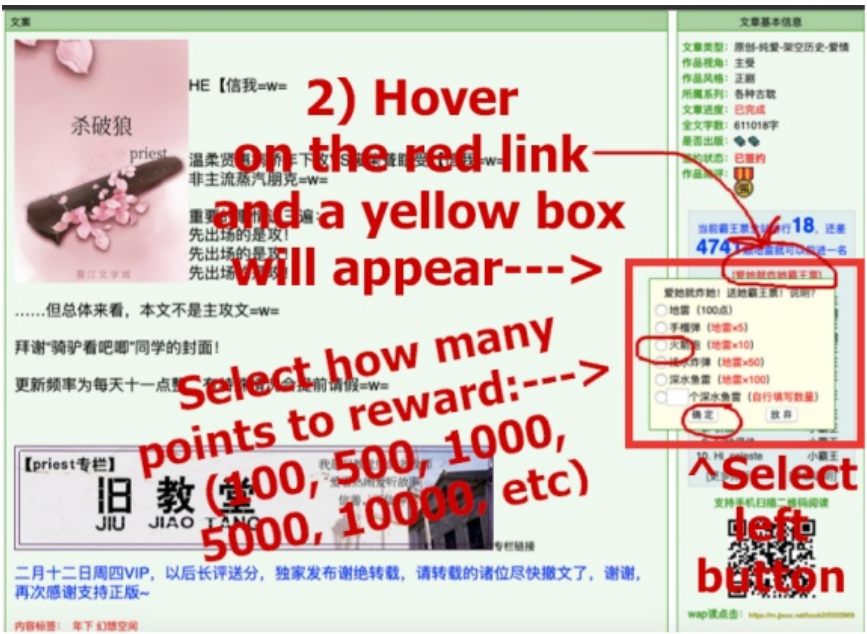
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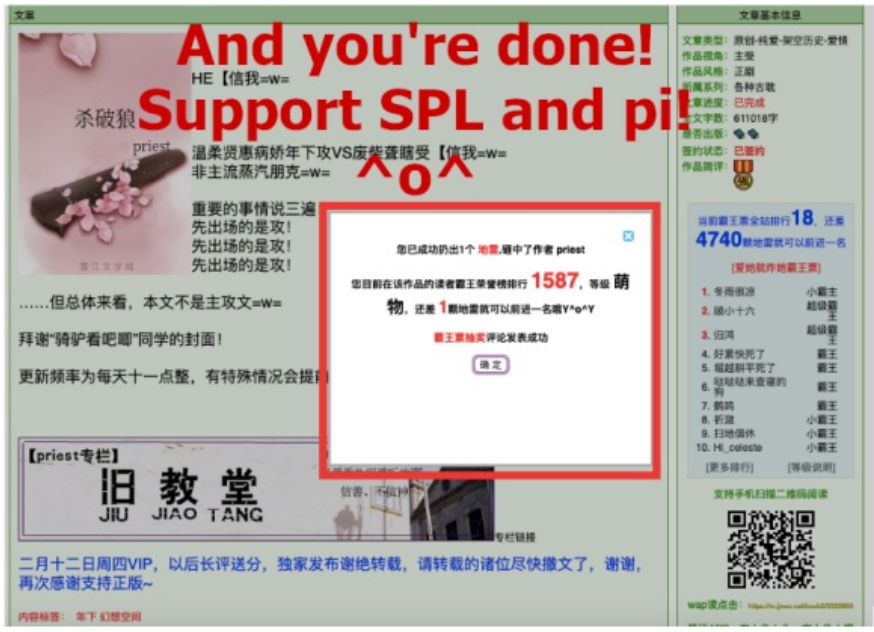
Select how many points to reward:---> (100, 500, 1000, 5000, 10000, etc)
^Select left button



For those **with no JJWXC accounts**, or for those **with accounts but**

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Chapter 2: Yìfù

**yìfù -义父 meaning: adoptive father, foster father*

Chapter 1 can be found in 2333 translations.
Chapter 1 can be found in 2333 translations.
Chapter 1 can be found in 2333 translations.
Chapter 1 can be found in 2333 translations. View the comment in this line for the link.

—

This night, lights floated on the river; souls returned home.

—

Chang Geng took the well-brewed bowl of medicine and entered his young father's chamber.

Shen Shiliu's room only had a single dimly-lit oil lamp, its glow was the size of a bean, similar to that of a firefly.

He was sitting by the window. Most of his face was hidden under the shadow of the lamp. Only a portion of it was visible and he appeared to had fallen asleep. Shen Shiliu did not wear a hair-crown*, his hair scattered all over. Two small beauty marks the color of cinnabar rested under the corner of his eye and on his earlobe, looking like they were created by a needle.

The only meager source of light in the room was all taken in by this pair of beauty marks, almost too blinding.

**an accessory to put your hair up in a bun or ponytail, as seen in ancient dramas*

Watching him under the light, his charm seemed to have multiplied three times more than usual.

Anyone would appreciate beauty even if he's already accustomed to it. Chang Geng's breathing still couldn't help but stagnate; he blinked quickly, as if to clear away that dazzling blood-red spot from

his eyesight.

He cleared his throat and raised his voice: "Shiliu, take the medicine."

The teenager was undergoing a voice-changing period. It was a little difficult to talk to this half-deaf. Fortunately, this time Shen Shiliu heard it, and the sound of the *hyun** that had the ability to urge people to urinate stopped.

**type of musical instrument with egg shape with holes on it*

Shen Shiliu's eyes narrowed to look at Chang Geng standing in the doorway: "Where are your manners, who did you just call?"

In reality, he was only approximately seven to eight years older than Chang Geng and was not yet married. He was fully aware of his good-for-nothing nature and had fully prepared to live this life alone unable to wed a wife. But suddenly, he got a son whom he did not have to raise himself; he wanted nothing more than to hold firmly onto the boy. Without anything else to do, he could only assert his role as his 'father' to emphasize the point.

Chang Geng ignored Shiliu and carefully put the medicine bowl in front of him: "Drink while it's still hot, it's no longer early, hurry and lie down after you finish drinking."

Shen Shiliu put aside the *hyun* and took the medicine bowl: "How ungrateful, was it not a good life being my son? I have wasted so much effort in treating you so well."

He drank the medicine without difficulty, downed it in one go, unmistakably used to it. He took two mouthfuls of plain water that Chang Geng handed him for rinsing and waved his hand: "There was a market in Changyang today, I brought home something exciting for you. Come here."

Shen Shiliu then bent over to search around the desk and due to his eyesight, the tip of his nose appeared as if it could graze its surface. Chang Geng had no choice but to respond: "What are you looking for? Let me look for you."

Then he couldn't help but complain: "I have already grown up, have you got nothing else to do but keep on bringing me children's playthings?"

If you have so much free time on your hands, why not just stop causing me trouble and let me study more useful things, Chang Geng rolled this thought in his head, and as the words were about to come out, it felt a little hurtful, and he did not say it.

All year round, Xu Baihu seldom stayed home, he was a good and honest man who was very kind to Chang Geng, although he did not often communicate with his stepchild. Thinking about it, Chang Geng had spent these most crucial years of his life with this improper yifu.

Shen Shiliu was a loiterer; spending day by day wasting time was one thing, but he must always drag Chang Geng along with him! If not to go to a market gathering, then it's to go horse riding.

On one occasion he even found a 'puppy' for Chang Geng to raise, causing Teacher Shen to turn green from fright. This blind man could not differentiate between wolf and dog and ended up bringing back a small wolf cub.

From a young boy who was growing into an adult, how much willpower did one need to not be ruined by Shen Shiliu's bad habits?

Chang Geng truly felt frightened as he recalled.

By nature, he was not the type that loved to play around, everything had his own planning that he would strictly follow. He did not like to be bothered by others; the constant disturbance from Shen Shiliu was greatly irritating.

But his irritability did not usually last long for Shen Shiliu truly loved him as a son, and was not taking advantage of him despite what his words may sound like.

That year when Chang Geng was infected with a severe illness, Xu Baihu was not at home as per usual. Physicians said that he was in danger. It was also his young yifu who took him home and watched

over him day and night endlessly for three days.

Every time he went out, no matter near or far, no matter what his business might be, he will surely present Chang Geng with some small toys or snacks. Chang Geng didn't love these things, but he can't help but love the fact that Shiliu kept him in his thoughts at any time and any place.

In short, every day that Chang Geng saw Shiliu, his irascibility would be extremely strong, but the moment he would not see the man, concern raised up in him.

Chang Geng sometimes thought to himself: although Shen Shiliu was not a martial man, nor was he scholarly, nor was he someone who can at least work himself to the bone, but in the future, will there be anyone who would be fooled by his good looks?

In the future, his yifu would eventually get married, birth his own children; would he still remember this adopted son?

When he thought about this subject, an indescribable feeling stirred up inside. He found a square box on Shiliu's table. He briefly shook off the train of thoughts in his head. He took it to Shen Shiliu: "This?"

Shen Shiliu: "It's for you, open it."

Maybe it was a slingshot, maybe a package of cheese, nevertheless, it could not be anything of worth - Chang Geng opened the box without any expectation and scolded: "You have to learn to save money even if we have some to spare, moreover, I am..."

The next moment, he saw the item in the box, and suddenly shut his mouth, his eyes widening.

There was an iron wristband in the box!

The so-called 'iron wrist buckle' in actuality was part of lightweight armors used in the military. It was very convenient as it was only a circle wrapping around the wrist, therefore it often got taken apart from the armor to be used separately.

The iron wristband was about four inches wide and could contain three to four small knives inside. The knife was made with unique craftsmanship, could be as thin as a cicada's wings, and could also be referred to as *Xiu zhong si**.

**lit. "a thread hidden inside a sleeve"*

It was said that the best *Xiu zhong si*, when fired off from the iron wristband, could split a single hair apart within a few feet's distance into two in the blink of an eye.

Chang Geng was surprised: "This... Where did you get it?"

Shen Shiliu: "Shh - don't let Shen Yi hear, this is not a plaything, he will start nagging again if he saw - do you know how to use it?"

Teacher Shen himself was watering the flowers in the courtyard. His hearing wasn't impaired, he could clearly make out the conversation inside the house. He did not know what to do with this half-deaf person who uses himself to measure others.

Chang Geng has followed Shen Yi to learn how to disassemble iron armors. He skillfully put on the iron wrist buckle, only then did he discover a special feature of this object.

Xiu zhong si was not easy to make, and there were very few floating around. Most of the iron wristbands on the market were old and used goods from the army. The size was, of course, also of an adult man. The one brought back by Shen Shiliu was obviously a size smaller, a perfect fit for a young teen.

Chang Geng was stunned; Shen Shiliu knew what he wanted to ask and slowly said: "I heard from the merchant that this is a defective good. There is nothing wrong with it, just that the size is a little small. Still, nobody wanted to purchase it, eventually he sold it to me for a cheap price, I couldn't use it for anything, you can play around with it. Just be careful, don't hurt anyone."

Chang Geng seldom let his delight show: "Thank you..."

Shen Shiliu: "Thank who?"

Chang Geng quickly cried: "Yifu!"

"Submit to whoever feeds you*, bastard!" Shen Shiliu laughed and put his arm around Chang Geng's shoulders, sending him off. "Go home, don't go stay out too late on the month of Forsaken Spirits."

有奶就是娘: Chinese idiom,*
lit. "The person who feeds me with milk is my mother."

Chang Geng listened to it for a while and pondered, it turned out that today was July 15th.

He walked back to his home through the side door. As he entered the doorway, he suddenly felt that the tune Shiliu was blowing on the *hyun* was a bit familiar: although it was completely off tune, but it truly resembled the tune of < *Song Xi* >, a song that was used as a burial cried among the people.

"*Is it appropriate?*" Chang Geng silently thought.

Shen Shiliu sent Chang Geng home, bowed his head to search around quite awhile, eventually found the outline of the door, and carefully stepped over to close it.

Teacher Shen, who was waiting in the courtyard, offered him a helping hand with a blank expression and led him back to their place.

Teacher Shen: "Iron wristband that was made from the best kind of iron, the three blades inside were created by Master Qiu Tian Lin himself. After the Master had passed away, they have stopped producing and selling it... *defective goods*?"

Shiliu did not answer.

Teacher Shen: "All right already, don't play coy with me - do you really want to raise him as your own son?"

"Of course I do, I like this child, righteous and benevolent," Shiliu

finally said, "*That* person probably also have this idea in mind. If I can really make him my heir and pass him my name, those people will be relieved. He could also live a much better life."

Teacher Shen was silent for a while, then whispered, "You have to make him not resent you first - are you not worried at all?"

Shen Shiliu smiled, lifting the hem of his robe and pushing the door into the house.

He said with a shameless face: "There are loads of people who resent me already."

This night, lights floated on the river; souls returned home.

Chang Geng was stirred up before dawn arrived, his body in a fervorous state, a thin layer of sweat on his back, his loincloth wet.

Every adolescent will experience such fright and confusion at least once - even if there was already someone to teach them in advance.

But Chang Geng did not panic, nor was he confused. He was nonchalant. He sat in bed for a moment, then proceeded to get up and washed up casually. There was a slight undetectable disgust lingering on his face.

He went out to fetch a bucket of cold water, scrubbed his still-growing body from head to toe, took out the neatly folded clothes besides the pillows, drank the tea that had been left there overnight, and started the day's study session as usual.

Chang Geng did not know what other people's dreams were like.

But he himself didn't actually have any spring dream*. He only dreamt of a snowstorm that could freeze people to death.

*春梦 *chūn mèng ; lit. "spring dream";*

erotic dream/wet dream (°ʖ°)

The wind of that day was like a white fur, ruthlessly passing by, the blood from his wounds had already condensed into ice slag before they could flow out, the roar of the wolves was far and near, he could no longer smell the rusty scent of blood, every breath brought in more pain, and the bittersweet scent that cut deep into one's bone. Chang Geng's limbs were stiff, his lungs were burning. He thought that this snow would swallow him whole.

But no.

When Chang Geng woke up again, he found that someone used their outer coat to wrap him in and carried him away.

He remembered that the man was dressed in white robes, a scent of bitter medicine lingered on his body. When he saw that Chang Geng was awake, he did not say a word, he just took out a wine jug and gave him a sip.

Chang Geng didn't know what kind of wine it was, he never had the chance to taste it again. He only remembered that even the *Shao Dao-zi** that was sold outside of town wasn't this strong. It was like fire rolling down his throat - burning all the blood in his body with just one sip.

**a type of wine*

That person was Shiliu.

It was immensely vivid. The sensation from the dream of Shiliu's hands carrying him still lingered on his body. Chang Geng still could not comprehend, wasn't that person a sickly man? In such frightening ice and snow, how could there be such steady and powerful hands?

Chang Geng looked down at the iron buckle wrapped around his wrist. He did not know what kind of material it was made of. Even after pressing against his body for a night, it did not warm up even the slightest. With the coolness of the cold iron, Chang Geng quietly waited for his heart and boiling blood to cool down, sneered, and mocked the ridiculous thought of '*seeing your yifu in a spring dream*',

then went to light up the lamp and started his reading as usual...

Suddenly, there was a rumbling sound in the distance, the ground and the small quarters were shaking and vibrating. It was only a moment later that he remembered that counting the days, it should be about time that the 'Giant Kite' of the Northern Patrol unit returned.

'Giant Kite' was a large ship with a length of more than 5,000 feet. The ship had two wings and was composed of thousands of 'flaming fins'. When the Giant Kite would take off, all the 'flaming fins' would sprout out white steam altogether, creating a dreamy imagery, every 'flaming fins' burned *Ziliujin** the size of a bowl inside, flashing a faint purple-red gleam in the vast expanse of smoke. It seemed like a million lights.

**Ziliujin-紫流金: lit.: "flow of purple gold" -*
a type of oil that power every steampunk gadgets in this universe,
ranging from gears in the military to household objects and more,
very crucial and immensely important,
you'll see this term coming up a lot throughout the book

Since fourteen years ago, the Northern Barbarian bowed to pay their tribute. Every year on the 15th of the first month, there would be dozens of Giant Kites setting off from the border areas. They each would take an established route, their might displayed for thousands of miles. They could also observe each and every move of the barbarians.

In addition to deterrence and inspections, the Giant Kite was also responsible for sending the tributes of the various northern tribes back to the capital, mainly *Ziliujin*.

The Giant Kite was loaded with nearly a million pound of *Ziliujin*, its returning footsteps were a bit heavier than when it took off. You can hear the angry blowing noise of 'flaming fins' from within twenty to thirty miles.

The Northern Patrol unit would set off on the first month of the year and would only return in six months time after departing.

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Chapter 3: Renowned General

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Shiliu was but a sickly blind-deaf, as a matter of course, he did not have any plans or ambitions in life, nor did he have any determination.

—

The Xu Family owned a few bits of land, Xu Baihu was also a military man. Life in the local areas was not bad at all. With some small family fortune they owned, they kept an old servant in the house to do some cooking and cleaning.

Only when dawn has broken did the Xu family's old maid slowly finish making breakfast. She came to knock on the door of Chang Geng's study room: "Young master, Madam inquired whether or not you'll have your meal at her chamber."

Chang Geng was currently concentrating on practicing calligraphy from existing samples, the motion of his hand stopped momentarily upon hearing the maid's call. He answered with a rehearsed — "No, Mother prefers peace and quiet, I will not bother her, would you mind passing my regards to her?"

The old maid was not surprised by his reply. The daily back and forth between the mother and the child was as routine, nothing new.

It was indeed quite strange. Logically, Xu Baihu was only but a stepfather; the ones with an actual biological connection were Chang Geng and Xiu Niang. But it was only when Xu Baihu stayed at home that this pair of mother and child would feast on the same table, exchange greetings, show filial piety, and pretend to be harmonious. As soon as the man of the family would leave, they were even stranger than strangers, and regard no attention to one another. They lived in the same house, yet Chang Geng didn't even use the main gate; every day, he'd run to their next-door-neighbor using the side entrance. The mother and son might not be able to see each other even if many months would pass.

Even before, when Chang Geng was infected with a serious illness that could cost him his life, Xiu Niang merely glanced at him with indifference, not a single concern about whether or not he was dead or alive.

In the end, it was Shiliu who took him away and cared for him.

The old maid has always suspected that Chang Geng was not Xiu Niang's biological child. However, their appearances were similar to one another, they unmistakably must have a blood-related relationship.

Moreover, a vulnerable and fragile woman who strayed away from her home country like Xiu Niang, who did not even have the strength to defend herself...if it was not her biological son, why would she still hold on to this child?

It was truly incomprehensible.

After a while, the old maid brought over a food container and said to Chang Geng: "Master will probably return today. Madam had asked Young Master to come home early."

Chang Geng understood what she meant: when Xu Baihu returned, they would have to put on the display of harmonious mother and son. He nodded and said, "I know."

His gaze fell on the food container. Suddenly, Chang Geng noticed a long strand of hair on its handle, and the hand that he had stretched out immediately flinched back.

The old maid's hair was already white. This black and silky strand of long hair would unquestionably not be hers. Xu Baihu hasn't come back yet. In this household, counting the servant, there were three people in total. If it is not the old maid's, then without a doubt, it must be Xiu Niang's.

Chang Geng had a strange kind of cleanliness - a son who despised his own mother.

He could eat the leftover rice in the bowl of his yifu with no problem when staying at their next-door neighbor place, but as soon

as he returned home, as long as Xiu Niang had laid her hand on something, he would never touch it.

The old maid was aware of this strange quirk of his. She carefully removed the hair and said with a smile: "Madam just accidentally let it fall on the surface of the box, no one has yet touched the breakfast inside, please rest assured."

Chang Geng politely smiled at her: "Don't mind it, by chance I also have some topics to ask of Teacher Shen today. I will have my breakfast over at yifu's place."

In the end, he did not accept the food container. He proceeded to gather all the notes and papers on the table, putting them under his arm, then grabbed the heavy sword hanging on the back door and left.

Teacher Shen was pulling up his sleeves and working in the yard to oil several pieces of steel armors that have been dismantled.

Steel armors were sent over by the officers and soldiers of the city's defensive force. The officers of Yanhui Town also had their own 'Mechanics Division' who specialized in maintaining military steel armors. However, the number of armors that required maintenance was too abundant, and when in a rush, they would also look for Mechanics from the common folks to share their loads with.

"*Chang Bei Shi* *- Mechanics" were those who repair steel armor and machines. They deal with 'iron fellas' all day, resembling the work of a craftsman. However, in the eyes of ordinary people, Mechanics and those who cut one's hairs or fine one's nail were almost the same. It was a job that belonged to the 'lower class'. While it could put food on the table, it was not considered a grand profession.

**长臂师: lit. "Long Arm Master", a term that Priest made up to call mechanics in this universe*

Teacher Shen was a scholarly man; no one understood why he had this unusual hobby. Not only did he like to mess around with them in his free time, but he also frequently used this skill to earn

some money, demeaning his educated and refined image quite a bit.

But Shen Shiliu - who entered the adolescent's dream by accident, was idly stretching his two long legs. He was sitting on the doorstep, leaning against the door frame as if there was not a single bone in his body, with an empty medicine bowl next to him - which he did not even bother to clean after he finished drinking.

Shiliu stretched his lower back, reached out, and weakly waved his hand at Chang Geng: "My son, go fetch me my wine bottle."

Teacher Shen, whose hands were full of machine oil and with sweat trickling, said to Chang Geng: "Don't mind him, have you eaten yet?"

Chang Geng: "I haven't."

Teacher Shen turned his head and snarled at Shiliu: "Just got up in the morning and already lying around waiting to get fed! Why can't you help out a bit? Go clean some rice and cook a few bowls of porridge!"

Shen Shiliu tilted his head, deaf 'just enough', slowly asked: "Ah? What?"

"Let me," Chang Geng was already used to this scenario, "What kind of rice?"

This time, Lord Shiliu heard clearly, raises his long eyebrows, and said to Teacher Shen: "Stop ordering children around, why can't you do it yourself?"

The usually polite and gentle Teacher Shen got provoked by this bastard of a brother every day, anger apparent on his face: "Didn't we say we will take turns? Not being able to hear is one thing, why is it that you never keep to your words?"

Shen Shiliu busted out his old usual trick, again he'could not hear', then asked, "What is he barking about?"

Incredibly real.

Chang Geng: "..."

Truly it was quite convenient to be a deaf man.

"He said that...," Chang Geng bowed his head and was struck by the playfulness in Shiliu's gaze, the dream of the night before flashed back right in front of his eyes. He suddenly found that he was not so unaffected.

Chang Geng's throat suddenly became a bit dry, he tried to steady his mind and said with an expressionless face: "Please sit still, don't play tricks so early in the morning."

Shen Shiliu didn't have the chance to get some drinks this morning. With only small bits of his conscience not soaked into liquor yet, he smiled and grabbed Chang Geng's hand, borrowing some strength to stand up, patted the boy's head intimately then stumbled into the kitchen.

He was really ready to be put to work - Lord Shiliu doing chores was an incredibly rare occurrence that has not been seen in a hundred years, almost comparable to the blossoming of iron trees*.

**from the idiom 铁树开花/tiě shù kāi huā/,*
lit."the iron tree blooms";
a highly improbable or extremely rare occurrence

Chang Geng hurriedly stepped after him, only to see his yifu carelessly grabbing a few handfuls of rice, throwing them all into the pot, pouring in water, splattering droplets all over. Next, he 'lowered himself' sticking two fingers inside to mix and stir around for a brief moment, then took them out, shaking the remaining water off of them and announced: "I'm done washing my half. Shen Yi, come and take turns."

Teacher Shen: "..."

Shen Shiliu then grabbed the wine bottle on the tabletop, tilting his head back to take a sip, his movements completely precise, like moving clouds and flowing water.

... Sometimes, Chang Geng suspected that even his blindness was

only an act.

Teacher Shen truly admitted defeat. No longer pointlessly arguing with him, he washed his hands with saponins, rushed into the kitchen, reheated their breakfast, and started to clean up the mess left behind by Shiliu.

Chang Geng took out the notes he wrote earlier this morning and showed them to Shen Yi. After Shen Yi had finished making his comments on them, Chang Geng put them into the stove to help keep the fire.

"Your handwriting improved quite a lot. A lot of effort was put in recently, was it not?" said Teacher Shen. "I see that you are imitating the writing of <*Chang Ting*-tie>* by the Marquis of Order**- Gu Yun?"

**poem written by Gu Yun,*
Chang Ting means 'a place where one can stop and rest';
what it probably means here is that he wrote this
while he was resting at certain places

**安定侯 */Āndìng Hóu/ Gu Yun's title*

Chang Geng: "Yes."

Shiliu who was idling on the side, upon hearing this, immediately turned his head. A strange expression flashed on his face.

Teacher Shen did not look up: "The Marquis of Order took over the army at the age of fifteen, his first battle has ended in glorious victory.

"He became the commander at age seventeen and went on the Western Expedition campaign under the Emperor's order. While passing through the outskirt of Xiliang City, he saw the historical remnants of the people from ancient times. He felt moved that the remains of former dynasties are still there, yet hundreds of years have already passed. With emotions rising up, he wrote down <*Chang Ting*- fu>

"Writing it is one thing, but those sugar-coating bunch had to secretly make a copy of it and engraved it on a stone tablet -

"Thinking about it, Gu Yun was taught by the renowned scholar of the present time - Mo Sen, his words have a lot for one to learn from, just that when writing <*Chang Ting*- fu> he was still young, with youthful ambitions, unaware of the vastness of heaven and earth, his experience was yet up to par... If you want to practice calligraphy, there are plenty of old ancients Notes for you to learn from, why must you choose the Note of someone from our present time?"

Chang Geng rolled up the papers that had been filled up with his practiced calligraphy and stuffed them into the stove without hesitation:

"I heard people say, Black Eagles, Black Armors, Black Cavalries - the three major factions of the Black Iron Camp - in the hands of the previous Marquis, had silenced the Eighteen Barbarian tribes. Later he passed it on to the young Marquis, he made the Western Regions bowed their heads. It's not that I liked his words. I just wanted to know, the hands that commanded the three Black Iron Camps: what does his handwriting look like?"

Teacher Shen unconsciously stirred around the pot with a spoon, his eyes seemed to have drifted to somewhere far away. After a while, he slowly said:

"The Marquis of Order's surname is Gu, first name Yun, called Gu Zi Xi, is the only son of the First Princess and the previous Marquis, his parents passed away in his early childhood. He was pitied by the Emperor, got taken in and was raised in the palace. He even gave him royal status.

"He should be living a wealthy life idling around, yet he has to run out to the Western Region to eat sand. Heroic or not heroic, I do not know, I am just afraid that he might not be quite alright in the head."

Teacher Shen was dressed in a white blouse, the collar of his robe was stained with machine oil, an old apron hung on his neck -

there were no women in this household, this pair of brothers living together, neither was more proper than the other. No one knew if that apron has ever been washed before as one could no longer see its original color; wearing it was just so indecent.

Only that face was well-defined.

The bridge of his nose was high, when not laughing or talking, his profile seemed awe-inspiring and almost stoic. His eyelids trembled slightly, and suddenly blurted out:

"Since the Old Marquis passed away, Black Iron Camp's grand achievements had sent fear and suspicions to the *one* up above, plus lowlife sugar-coating subjects rampaging the royal court -.."

Shiliu who had not said a word until now suddenly interrupted him: "Shen Yi."

The two people on the side of the stove looked at him at the same time, Shiliu was staring at a small cobweb on the doorframe.

Shiliu's face did not show any sign of alcohol, the more he drank the whiter his face became, the slightest bits of emotions were all absorbed into his eyes that you could no longer see them clearly.

He spoke in a low voice: "Don't talk nonsense."

The brothers of the Shen family usually did not care about manners. The younger brother would disrespect his elder, and the older brother would cater to the younger's every whim. They argued loudly from morning to night every day, yet the bonds between them were very good.

Chang Geng had never heard Shiliu spoke in such a serious and stiff manner before.

He was sensitive by nature; he frowned deeply for he did not fully comprehend this situation.

Shen Yi's jaw tightened a bit. Realizing that Chang Geng was observing him, he involuntarily took back his emotions, and smiled: "I went a bit too far - but words of insulting the imperial court are

merely idle conversations to have after dinner, are they not? I was only casually making some comments ."

Chang Geng could sense the awkward atmosphere, he smartly switched the subject and asked: "During the ten years from the Northern Expedition to the Western Campaign, who is in charge of the Black Iron Camp?"

"No one was in charge," Shen Yi replied. "After the Northern Expedition, the Black Iron Camp was initially quiet: some left, some had passed away, some of the older veterans in the army were left feeling very disheartened.

"After more than a decade, the soldiers from that year have been changed to the newer generation, equipment and gears that have not been replaced for many years, have all been rusted and broken.

"Up until a few years ago, the Western Region rebelled, the imperial court had no other solution but to allow the Marquis of Order to take on this mission during trying times, and start the Black Iron Camp anew,

"To say that Marshall Gu took command of Black Iron Camp, it is better to say that he has once again trained a group of elite powerhouses in the Western Region. If you have the opportunity, it is better for you to learn his current style of writing."

Chang Geng was startled: "Teacher Shen has seen the writing of the Marquis from his later years? "

Shen Yi laughed: "Although rare, occasionally there are one or two pages going around in the market, all claiming to be authentic and genuine, whether they are the real deal or not, I do not know. "

He said while blowing off the white steam, placing their meals on the table. Knowing his manners, Chang Geng stepped over to help. As he was carrying the bowl of porridge, he passed by Shiliu. The man reached out and grabbed his shoulder.

Chang Geng grew faster than an average teenager, his stature was already bigger than his peers. Even though still lacking some

flesh and bone, he was already catching up with his young yifu in height, so just by tilting his head up a bit, he could already look directly into Shiliu's eyes.

Shiliu actually had a pair of signature peach blossom eyes*, only when his gazes were scattered that one would notice this because as soon as they become focused, his pupils seem to have a pair of black endless abyss, hidden deep in dark clouds where one could not see the bottom.

**flirtatious eyes*

Chang Geng's heart jumped, he lowered his voice and deliberately used the pronoun he normally did not use: "Yifu, what is it?"

Shiliu said casually: "Children should have fun, don't go all day thinking about trying to be a hero, has there ever existed a hero that had a good ending? All you need is food on the table and a roof over your head, a worry-free life is the best kind of life to live, a little bit short on the budget or a bit too much downtime is nothing to worry about."

Shen Shiliu playing dumb was a usual everyday occurrence, he rarely ever spoke of anything sensible, but the moment he did, it was to immediately splash cold water on Chang Geng.

Shiliu was but a sickly blind-deaf, as a matter of course, he did not have any plans or ambitions in life, nor did he have any determination. But how could any young person listen to these demotivational words?

Chang Geng was a little uncomfortable inside, he felt as if he was being looked down upon. He thought with irritation: *"Spending each day loitering around like you then who will be there to support this family in the future? Who will clothe you and feed you? It truly is easier said than done!"*

Avoiding the hand of Shiliu, he replied just for the sake of it: "Don't move. Be mindful not to burn yourself with the hot porridge."

Chapter 4: Giant Kite

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The Northern Patrol unit was already this mighty, then the national weapon —The Black Iron Camp's three major factions — what kind of prowess would they behold?

—

The Shen family did not pay attention to the rule 'be quiet at the table, be quiet at bedtime'*. While eating, Teacher Shen gave Chang Geng a lecture about 'the Great Learning'**, after a while, he started to lose his main focus point and ended up mixing 'how to maintain steel armor in the winter' into his lecture.

食不言寝不语; idiom; Don't talk while eating,*
don't speak after lying down for sleep

***Daxue* 大學 *"The Great Learning" is a Confucian Classic.*
It is part of the canon of the Sishu 四書 *"Four Books",*
to which it was added as integral Confucian writing
on the order and harmony of society.

He was a man of extensive knowledge; whatever subjects he could think of, he talked about. On one occasion, he even enthusiastically explained to Chang Geng the methods to prevent and control horse-related diseases that even a deaf man like Lord Shiliu could not listen to it anymore and had to force him to shut up.

After finishing his lecture, as Teacher Shen was cleaning the tableware with dissatisfaction for he hasn't had the chance to talk more, he said to Chang Geng:

"Today, I have to finish fixing up all these Iron Armors. Those people did not give them proper maintenance causing the joints to get all rusted. I may have to go out to pick some herbs in the afternoon. Ge Ban Xiao and the others have all asked for a day off, do

you have any plans?

Chang Geng: "I will go to the Generals Slope to practice my..."

The word 'sword' had not yet even left his mouth, when he turned back Shen Shiliu had already hung up his iron sword on the wall and declared: "My son, come, the Giant Kite will probably return to the city today, let's us go join in on the fun."

Chang Geng was powerless: "Yifu, I just said to Teacher Shen..."

Shen Shiliu: "What? Speak louder."

Great. Here we go again.

The Giant Kite came and went, every year was the same. Chang Geng couldn't think of anything refreshing and new, but before he could protest, Shiliu had already half-dragged half-pulled him out the door.

The summer heat had not subsided, people still dressed in thin garments. Shiliu's whole body was clinging onto Chang Geng's back, the scent of bitter medicine encircled all around him.

Just like in his dream...

Chang Geng suddenly felt strangely unnatural. He bowed his head to avoid his yifu, covering his nose and pretended to sneeze.

Shiliu smirked and teased: "Someone is missing you, could it be the young lady with a round face from Old Wang's house?"

Chang Geng finally couldn't help it anymore, his expression stiffened and he bluntly said: "Yifu, teasing your son like this...is it appropriate?"

Shen Shiliu would, of course, pay it no mind. He smiled and said: "Not appropriate? Oh, I have never been a father before. I do not know the proper boundary. I will be more mindful next time."

Whoever tried to talk some sense with Shiliu, they would surely blow up in anger.

Chang Geng slapped the hand of this indecent man off of his shoulder and walked out first.

Teacher Shen said from the back: "Shiliu! Remember to come back early to chop the firewood!"

Shen Shiliu walked as if his feet were lathered with oil and shamelessly replied: "Can't hear you, goodbye!"

Chang Geng who was pushed into a half-run half-walk asked him: "When did you start to become deaf?"

Shen Shiliu only laughed, his expression unfathomable.

At this time, the two just passed by the main entrance of Chang Geng's house, the main gate creaked then opened.

A woman in a long white dress came out, and as soon as Chang Geng caught sight of her, the irritation mixed with annoyance on his face immediately vanished.

It's as if a bucket of cold water had been poured on him from head to toe. The eyes that were still trying to suppress anger suddenly became hollow - even the fire and liveliness were withdrawn altogether.

The woman was Xiu Niang, Chang Geng's mother in name.

She was no longer young, yet her beauty had not faded away for one bit. Standing in the morning light, she resembled the sketch of delicate beauty.

Such a woman, even if she was a widow, should not be wedded to just a lowly mayor from a small town far out in the border.

Xiu Niang fixed her attires, put her hands together, and bowed down with utmost grace: "Lord Shiliu."

Shen Shiliu only directed his improper behaviors at Shen Yi. In the presence of a woman, he immediately took the shape of a true gentleman. He slightly leaned sideways and avoided looking directly at Xiu Niang's face. He greeted with refined courtesy: "Madam Xu, I'm

taking Chang Geng out for some fun."

"Thank you for your trouble," Xiu Niang smiled without showing teeth. Then she turned to Chang Geng and whispered softly: "Your father is coming back today. If you go out, remember to bring a box of lip color back for me."

She spoke as soft as a mosquito - as if the words could vanish into thin air, but before Chang Geng could answer, Shen Shiliu had cut in first: "Madam, rest assured."

Chang Geng: "..."

Only now did he have some vague ideas about his yifu's 'deaf rules' — Shen Yi's every word, he would not 'hear' any of them; other people's words, he must evaluate whether he liked 'hearing' them or not, and as for those young misses and ladies, even if a female mosquito made a faint noise, he could without a doubt hear them crystal clear.

Not only was he a lazy loiterer, but he was also a flirt!

It's as if the term "gold and jade appearance yet rotten inside"* was made just for him.

金玉其外，败絮其中; idiom; gilded exterior, shabby and ruined on the inside*

When the Giant Kite would come back, the children from all the nearby neighboring towns would gather together for the occasion at the city's gate. Whenever there's a crowd, there will be people who'd take advantage of it and start their business. They slowly formed a large scale market, the locals called it 'Yan Zi market'.

Shen Shiliu had never learned to read other people's expressions. Even if he did notice, he would still pay it no mind.

He seemed to be unaware of the mood of his adoptive son as he roamed around on the overcrowded market excitedly, taking interest in everything he laid eyes on.

Chang Geng was already filled with annoyance, he also had to

follow Shiliu's every step and constantly keep an eye on him so he wouldn't get lost.

In recent years, the world was not stable, people were poor, and most of the trades in the market were small things that the local farmers produced. There were no delicious food and nothing good to drink, it was boring enough to kill.

It was said that wars were the reason for making the lives of people more difficult, and the taxes paid for by the common masses became heavier and heavier after each year.

But in the past, after each battle, they were always able to recuperate for a while.

Yet, no one knew why in recent years, the people seemed to never have enough room to catch a breath.

Counting the recent twenty years, Great Liang first had the Northern Expedition, then had the Western Expedition, became a great nation, and earned respects among the neighboring countries, upholding immense honor.

But it's strange that the people were getting poorer and poorer.

Chang Geng was bored to death wandering around the market that he wanted to let out a deep yawn. He only hoped that this country-bumpkin Shiliu who was curious about everything would tire himself out soon so they could go back. He would rather be Teacher's Shen assistant instead.

Shen Shiliu bought a bag of roasted salted beans and ate them while he walked. And as if he had eyes on the back of his head, he stretched out a hand and accurately inserted a salted bean into Chang Geng's mouth.

Chang Geng was caught off guard, accidentally licked his finger, and ended up biting the soft meat of his mouth in panic. He called out in pain and angrily glared at the trouble-bringer Shiliu.

"Withered flowers can bloom again, a person's youth cannot remain."

Shen Shiliu did not look back. He picked up a single bean, lifted it up, and pointed in the direction of the sun. His hands were incredibly beautiful, slender and white, like a pair of hands belonging to the youths of pristine families, more befitting to lift a chess piece, or to carry a notebook; holding this black bean was very unsuitable.

Shen Shiliu said with the manner of someone who had been through many ups and downs: "When you grow up, you will understand that one's youth is only as big as the size of a bean, it would pass over you in the blink of an eye. Never again will it return. Only then will you realize how much time you have wasted. "

Chang Geng: " ..... "

He really could not understand, how can someone like Shiliu have the audacity to talk about such thing as 'wasted time'?

Just then, the crowd of people near the city gate suddenly burst into cheers.

Even if one is half-blind, one can still see the 'Giant Kite' lowering down from the distance.

There were countless flaming fins pointing upward, a million white smoke bursting out, their steam resembled cotton wool falling right out of the sky.

Then, a huge ship slowly emerged from the vast expanse of the smoke, the eight dragon heads decorating the front of the ship appeared as if they're real, and cut through the clouds as it moved forward with unparalleled might.

Shen Shiliu was startled at first, then he tilted his head, the cinnabar-color beauty mark on his earlobe appeared to be flashing red. He frowned, whispering: "How come the ship is so light this year?"

But his words quickly faded into the loud thundering noise of the Giant Kite surrounding them and the lively cheers of the crowd. Even Chang Geng, who was right by his side, did not catch this.

The children began to hold onto their own small bamboo

baskets, fighting to get in the best position and wait for the rations.

A group of officers and men lined up and moved out, and the soldiers in charge of signaling were standing behind the three *zhang** tall *tong hou***, awaiting command.

**丈, an ancient unit of measurement, equal to 3.2 meters.*

***铜吼, lit. copper roar, name of the horn speaker in this universe.*

The '*tong hou*'was like a big horn, placed side by side on the wall of the city. There is a circle of green rust on the outside, pleasant looking, and their shape resembled a carved flower.

The commander took a deep breath, raised his voice and spoke into one end of the tong hou, the sound coming out from the other end was magnified dozens of times, echoing endlessly.

"Kite had returned, open - the - passage -"

Two rows of officers and men, upon hearing the command, grabbed the huge wooden wheel handles on the tower and shouted all together. They were topless, showing their muscles, and using their strength altogether, the wooden wheel from above spun around and the path made of large stones under the city was divided into two.

The numerous interlocking gears were twisted in a circle, and the stone bricks on both sides were divided into two roads.

The earth split open, revealing a deep dark river underground, running through the entirety of Yanhui town.

The commander blew a long sound from the *tong hou* and the sound carried throughout all directions.

The Kite also responded with a roar. Then, countless flaming wings were simultaneously exerted, and the steam was frantically surging all around - it was ready to land.

The first patch of 'Rations' rained down from above, the groups of little children underneath were in a frenzy, all reaching out to grab

hold of them.

Unfortunately, the path for sending out Rations was short. Very soon, the Giant Kite landed at the center of the river, proudly standing still on the water surface, and came to a halt in front of everyone.

The ship's body struck awe in one's heart, and the faint glimmer of the cold metal was full of unspeakable killing intent. The signaling sound of the ship was strangely dreadful and tragic; it wouldn't stop resonating throughout all of Yanhui Town, like fallen souls on the battlefield from many millennia had woken up and sung in unison.

The Giant Kite entered the city along the dark river, little by little, cutting through the water. A soldier on board made a long signal.

"Light - off -"

The ship's two flaming wings were immediately extinguished: there was a burnt scent comparable to that of firecrackers that had been blown up lingering in the air. The Giant Kite marched forward, flowing with the river's current, decorations with the shape of dragons all around its body resembled totems from another time and age, bringing along with it a demonic aura.

Chang Geng was watching the Giant Kite attentively from the crowd. Even though he said that he did not want to come and he had seen the Kite returned many times, yet when facing the real deal, he was still stunned by the impressive size of the ship.

The Northern Patrol unit was already this mighty, then the national weapon —The Black Iron Camp's three major factions — what kind of prowess would they behold?

The young boy who was confined in this remote and narrow corner of Yanhui town could not picture it no matter how hard he tried.

The Giant Kite approached, the heat waves from the already extinguished flaming fins flashing onto one's face. Chang Geng

subconsciously went to grab the person next to him and said: "The Kite had arrived, there are too many people here, let's step back a little."

But no answer came, he grabbed on to thin air. Chang Geng turned back and found that his troublesome yifu had disappeared.

Chapter 5: Xiu Niang

—

But thinking about the moments before as concern burned up in him, this man was just casually picking out lip color! The fire of anger that was now consuming him made his chest hurt too much that he could not suppress them down no matter what.

—

Chang Geng struggled to stand on his toes. He looked over the crowd with difficulty and shouted: "Shiliu!"

There was no response. The crowd chasing the Giant Kite began to surge up all at once. Some cheered, some called out *'It's here!'*, some yelled *'Stop pushing!'* with frustration.

Chang Geng was bumped into by several people at this point, his irritation grew more and more. He shouted as loud as he could: "Yifu!"

The crowd started to rush along the side of the dark river. Chang Geng, on one hand, had to struggle to keep himself steady against the flow of people, and he also had to look back and forth for Shiliu. He started to break out in a sweat. The amazement upon seeing the Giant Kite just now had all evaporated.

Having this kind of yifu took years of your life away!

Chang Geng angrily thought to himself: "*Shen Shiliu truly just monkeys around. On such a hot day like this, having nothing else to do, he really had to run out here to see a crowd of people!*"

At this moment, someone loudly shouted: "Stop pushing already, someone fell down!"

As Chang Geng was looking left and right, he started to look in the direction of the yelling involuntarily.

A small group of people on the riverside was starting to fall into confusion.

"My god, how can someone really fall down!"

"Go and find the military officer on duty!"

"Make way! Please make way! Can't move ..."

Chang Geng was about to move out of the way of a person who was desperately trying to get out when he faintly heard: "Lord Shiliu, be careful!"

Chang Geng was stunned. Suspecting that maybe his nerve was getting the best of him, he stepped forward to grab someone who just broke away from the crowd: "Who is falling? Is it Shen Shiliu?"

The man may or may not even had caught what Chang Geng was saying, he absentmindedly nodded: "Seems to be - let me go first."

There was an explosion inside his head. He was standing in the heat of the Giant Kite yet a layer of cold sweat broke out on his back.

At that moment, he immediately took a deep breath and quickly moved against the flow of people and towards the shore at the fastest speed. His feet stumbled a bit before he could grab the railing to steady himself.

He rushed to look down and saw that there was indeed a person struggling in the water.

The water surface of the underground river was about six or seven feet deep down from the ground, one could not make out its bottom, cold and dark. Large white waves were continuously crashing. The person in the river had nowhere to grab on to, even their struggles could not be heard from where Chang Geng was, and there was no way to figure out who it was down there.

Chang Geng took off his coat: "Let me through! Please make way."

Someone called out: "You can't jump straight in! Someone get the

boy a rope!"

It was unclear who quickly stuffed a rope into his hand. Chang Geng grabbed it. He looked up and glanced at the Giant Kite that would arrive at any moment now, then jumped into the river without hesitation.

"Tighten up! Hurry! They will be washed away when the Kite gets here!"

The force of the incoming Giant Kite caused a wave higher than a grown person to rise up, crashing onto Chang Geng's chest as soon as he jumped in. Water got into his mouth and he almost got swept away. He quickly grabbed onto the rope hanging from the shore and tried to wipe his face.

The loud sound of the water crashing and the noise of the Giant Kite slowing its speed was deafening, Chang Geng's vision was filled with nothing but white waves. He can vaguely make out the shout of someone on the shore: "Stop letting the rope out any further! The Giant Kite is coming! Pull the boy up quickly before it's too late!"

Chang Geng: "Wait!"

But all the noises in the water were so loud that he couldn't even hear his own shouts.

He motioned his hand to signal for the people on the shore to stop pulling the rope back in, while he struggled to swim towards the place with the most intense waves at the same time.

In the midst of chaos, someone held on to his hand that was frantically searching around, and Chang Geng could not think much in this situation. He quickly grabbed the person's wrist and pulled them into his arms. He still didn't have the chance to see who it was, but the Kite already rumbled as it moved forward.

The people on the shore did not dare to delay, the rough rope that was tightened around his waist suddenly gave force, his entire body felt heavy as several men on the shore joined together to pull him in.

After coming out of the water surface, he felt that the weight in his arm was a little off. Chang Geng quickly blinked away the water droplets on his eyelashes and suddenly found that the person he pulled up was not Shen Shiliu all along. It was the eleven-year-old child, Cao Niangzi.

At this time, a long signaling horn from the Giant Kite pierced through his ears, he could not afford to think anymore. He yelled out and helped the half-conscious Cao Niangzi to go up first.

The people on the shore shouted and tried their best to pull the two boys up, but they were slightly too slow. Chang Geng's feet were still outside the river bank. The Giant Kite's momentum had not stopped, and a flaming fin was about to sweep across his legs. It was still a distance away yet one could already feel the hot and intense heatwave.

"The flaming fins cannot be touched!"

"Be careful!"

At this moment, a pair of pale hands quickly reached out, passed through all the screams, and grabbed Chang Geng's arm and pulled him straight up. The group of people exclaimed and backed away. Chang Geng felt as if he almost flew right out of the crowd, but ended up falling into the arms of a man.

He involuntarily took a deep breath, a medicinal scent instantly immersed into his nostrils. Chang Geng jerked his face up, the tip of his nose almost grazed Shen Shiliu's clear-cut jawline.

Shen Shiliu's expression was heavy: "I looked away for a second and you're already causing troubles!"

Being scolded first, he suddenly could not say a word.

Shen Shiliu: "There are so many officers and men on the shore, does anyone need a child like you to come to the rescue?"

Chang Geng: "..."

His heart that was hanging in the air fell back into its place. The

blood that gathered in his chest flowed through his numbed limbs like water flushing through a floodgate. At this point, he could finally let out his first breath, there was an uncomfortable feeling as if his internal organs were turned upside down. His two legs were so soft that he almost could not stand.

Cao Niangzi had been carried to the side, coughed a few times then slowly woke up. Seeing that the child was no longer facing serious problems, Shiliu hauled Chang Geng out of the crowd, a deep scowl visible on his face. Chang Geng, whose legs were still weak and shaky, was being dragged away by Shiliu. He scolded him as they walked, "The temperature of the fin did not subside yet. If you touch it, it can sweep away half of your legs. Do you want to be a cripple for the rest of your life? A young kid who does not know his own limits..."

Chang Geng was still shakily trying to steady himself, but Shiliu the 'villain' had already stolen the words right out of him before he could say anything first. His anger suddenly bubbled up.

He shouted at the top of his lungs: "I thought you fell down!"

Shen Shiliu lifted two long eyebrows: "Stop finding excuses! I am already a grown man, how can I fall into the river for no reason?"

Chang Geng: "..."

His heart that was easily worked-up over concern was being cast aside like it was nothing. Burning red heat rushed from his neck to the root of his ear. He couldn't tell if it was from embarrassment or anger, just that even water could not put away this flame anymore.

"All right, don't stay here anymore," Shen Shiliu reached out and touched Chang Geng's long wet hair. He untied his own outer robe and wrapped it around Chang Geng. "This place is too chaotic. I will not argue with you about this matter today. Hurry home and change your clothes, pay attention not to catch a cold."

He was quite generous too!

Chang Geng violently slapped away the hands of Shiliu, his fingers accidentally bumping against something hard inside the sleeve.

Shen Shiliu: "Oh, that is the lip-color that I just bought, remember to bring it back to your mother... Hey, Chang Geng, where are you going?"

Chang Geng did not wait for him to finish; he ran away without saying a word.

Chang Geng knew full well that he was being stubborn. He purely reacted on impulse upon hearing someone else's words. He did not even see who fell down, but he already panicked and jumped in after. Getting scolded by yifu was perfectly reasonable.

But thinking about the moments before as concern burned up in him, this man was just casually picking out lip color! The fire of anger that was now consuming him made his chest hurt too much that he could not suppress them down no matter what.

Shen Shiliu was suddenly left behind by Chang Geng, awkwardly rubbing his nose. He came to the conclusion that every young boy must go through a certain period where they're unpredictable and moody.

First-time-father Shen Shiliu was quite concerned, he thought to himself: "*If I knew beforehand that something like this would happen... I'd have saved the iron wristband for this situation. He is definitely mad for real this time, how will I coax him now?*"

He stood near the river with both hands behind his back. The Giant Kite had moved past from his side, the lights at its tail were flickering. The dark river behind it was slowly closing up.

Shen Shiliu was only concerned for a brief moment, he began to stare at the direction of the taillight, but his gaze was not as scattered

as usual when looking into the distance. Then, his brows slowly crunched together.

Suddenly, his figure disappeared into the crowd like a fish in the water. His footsteps were silent, his movements extremely fast, unlike the usual days where he would search around half a day just to find the doorway.

Chang Geng headed back home. The hot summer wind blew through the cold river water on his body making him a little calmer, the irritation and the scowl on his eyebrows gradually dissipating.

His eyes resembled Xiu Niang's immensely. The facial contours that have just started to mature were very deep. They were not like the people of Central Plains... but they were not very similar to foreigners either. In short, it was a very special kind of good look.

Chang Geng has just stepped into the house when he immediately saw the old maid standing on her toes and looking out. The old maid was taken aback when she first caught sight of his messy appearance: "Oh no, how did you become like this?"

"It's nothing," Chang Geng said weakly. "Someone fell into the river, I jumped in to help them and got wet."

The old maid took a small step behind him and whispered: "Madam said that we should not serve up the meals yet, I assumed she wanted to wait for the Mayor - Ah yes, Madam had also asked that young master come over to her chamber, she said there were some private matters between mother and child."

As Chang Geng stepped forward, his shoulders involuntarily tightened, and after a while, he nodded. He first returned to his own room to change into dry clothes. Sulky and annoyed, he carefully folded Shen Shiliu's robe, then picked up the box of lip color and went to Xiu Niang's room.

The old maid was curious about Chang Geng and Xiu Niang's strange mother-child relationship but did not dare to inquire about it. And so, she followed him planning to eavesdrop.

Standing in front of Xiu Niang's door, Chang Geng fixed up his attire, as formal as meeting with a guest. It was only after he looked proper and tidy enough that he lowered his head and knocked:

"Mother."

There was a cold and clear voice of a woman coming from the inside: "Come in."

Chang Geng reached out and pushed the door open. After entering, he looked back and saw the old maid peeking at them. She was startled upon meeting his gaze and looked away. When she looked back again after a bit, the doors had been closed and nothing could be seen anymore.

Xiu Niang's room was very dark, and the sun-facing window on one side was covered up by her.

It's as if she did not want to see any light, she was sitting alone in a dark corner, facing a mirror.

Chang Geng looked at her figure from behind and frowned slightly.

He did not know what had gone to Xiu Niang's head. She wore a soft-yellow dress and put up her hair in the style of an unmarried woman. Years had treated her well, coupled with the darkness of the room that easily covered the wrinkles around her eyes, she really appeared like a woman in her twenties.

As Chang Geng was about to call out to her, Xiu Niang took the lead and spoke first: "With no one else around, do not call me mother - did you bring the lip color back?"

Chang Geng heard this. He swallowed back the second 'mother' that was about to leave his mouth, then walked over and gently dropped the box that has been warmed up in his palm on her makeup table.

"Oh, this color is very lovely. Very bright," Xiu Niang finally showed a rare smile.

She rubbed a little bit of it with her fingertips, wiped it across her pale lips, and looked at herself in the mirror with enthusiasm. She asked, "Does it look good?"

Chang Geng stood coldly on the side not making a single sound. His heart felt strangely dark for he did not understand why she asked him to come here.

As he was thinking about it, his eyelid on one side suddenly twitched twice without warning. Chang Geng felt disconcerted, there seemed to be some kind of ominous premonition swelling up in his heart.

At this moment, Xiu Niang opened her mouth: "In the future, you can stop calling me mother in front of outsiders.

"Our path as mother and son, it ends here today."

She lifted her face that had been fully made over, stretched out a pair of fragile hands like a piece of grass as if intending to adjust Chang Geng's collar.

Chang Geng backed away in surprise: "What do you mean?"

Chapter 6: Cursed

—

"No one will love you. No one will treat you with sincerity."

—

Xiu Niang smiled and withdrew her hand.

Her lips were covered with the lip coloring Shen Shiliu bought. Her pale and dignified face became even more beautiful than before, as if a flower that had fully absorbed blood.

"I know that you have been wondering about this matter. As we're having this chance today, let's make it clear: you really are not my own," said Xiu Niang. "Did it make you feel better inside after hearing this?"

Chang Geng's eyes twitched a bit; he was still young and have not yet learned how to conceal his emotions.

In this world, no matter how good a friend is or how good a teacher is, no one can replace a mother. Even a father couldn't - it's not that Chang Geng never yearned for a mother, only that sometimes, knowing that your wish could never be true yet refusing to accept your fate, then that would be the most painful of all. Even he would have pitied himself.

Chang Geng had thought countless times: he could never be Xiu Niang's own son. Now, he suddenly got his answer. His heart felt nothing but the emptiness that he himself did not understand.

The foreboding premonition in Chang Geng's heart gradually strengthened and he was immediately alert: "Why are you telling me this out of nowhere?"

Xiu Niang looked at her face in the mirror. It may be that too

much powder had made her face a little pale, so she carefully scooped a little of lip coloring and applied it evenly on her cheeks.

"'*Chang Geng*' is the childhood name I gave to you," Xiu Niang said. "The people of the Central Plains have a saying: '*Qi Ming in the east, Chang Geng in the west*.'* It raised at dusk, the warden of carnage, ominous. Flowing in your body is the world's noblest yet filthiest blood. Born to be a disastrous monster, there is no other name more fitting than this."

**东有启明，西有长庚; Dōng yǒu qǐmíng, xī yǒu chánggēng;*
*Chang Geng(长庚; lit. Excellent West One; English name is Lucifer**)*
is how people of ancient China refer to the planet Venus
when it raised at dusk(evening Venus); an unlucky star.
Qiming (启明; lit Opener of Brightness) refers to the morning Venus.

Chang Geng replied coldly: "Was I not the result of when you wandered to the western mountains and got captured by bandits? Even all ten fingers cannot count the numbers of my 'fathers' - the son of a prostitute and a bandit, what is this nobility you spoke of?"

Xiu Niang was stunned for a brief moment. She did not look back.

A hint of pain flashed in her expressive eyes.

But it quickly subsided and fell into calmness.

Chang Geng's earliest memory was inside the mountain hideout of bandits. Xiu Niang always locked him inside a cabinet that reeked of the musty scent of old wood.

Through the small cracks of the rotten wood, young and tiny Chang Geng could see those drunken mountain bandits barging in.

Those cruel and savage men either beat her or ravished her right in front of little Chang Geng's eyes.

In the beginning, the bandits were very strict with guarding Xiu Niang. Slowly, seeing that she was weak and fragile and did not know how to resist or defend herself, they became laxer with her. Later they even let her out and made her serve them as the other old

servants in their camp. Xiu Niang poisoned all the wells and the hundreds of altar of wines, even God did not know how she had his much poison on her.

She used a small bowl to fetch the poisonous well water for Chang Geng to drink. However, after he really did swallow it down, she seemed to regret it and desperately dug at his throat to make him vomit it back out.

Xiu Niang put the half-dead Chang Geng into a bamboo basket and carried him on her back, a steel knife in her hand. If there's someone who was not yet dead, she came forward to stab them.

Chang Geng remembered that she was wearing a long red dress that was stained with blood. She used the oil and *Ziliujin* that the head of the bandits secretly stored to burn this place down to the ground then left with him.

In his short lifespan of more than ten years, Xiu Niang had attempted to kill him many times; gave him poisonous wine, stabbed him with a knife, tied him to a horse then dragged him along, and even for countless midnights, when he was jolted awake finding that his limbs were powerless, it was Xiu Niang trying to suffocate him with a quilt...

But every time, she would always stop right in front of the cliff, keeping his puny life.

This also left him with an unrealistic fantasy.

Chang Geng said with as much calmness as he can muster: "You think too much, I have never thought of you as my mother. But I have always felt that the reason you despised me was that I am the stain that the bandits left on you."

Xiu Niang sat in front of the mirror, her face becoming paler and paler. After a long time, she suddenly sighed:

"Little child, I have wronged you."

At that moment, Chang Geng's thousands of layers of defense and resentment almost collapsed; he then realized that the grievances

from his childhood until now could be easily resolved by just this simple sentence.

The fourteen-year-old boy used all his strength to hold back his tears, then asked tiredly: "What do you wish to achieve by telling me this now? Has your conscience told you to detoxify me? Or to just simply kill me off?"

Xiu Niang looked at him with a strange expression as if the boy was a valuable artifact: "You knew..."

Chang Geng: "I certainly know that from the day we arrived at Yanhui Town, there is not a single time where I didn't have nightmares. Even if it was a nap during the day, I will still undoubtedly wake up from bad dreams."

The night before was the only exception - Chang Geng's thoughts ran astray for a brief moment. He suddenly regretted that he got mad at Shiliu.

Chang Geng: "I have never made any grand achievements, but I have never done any immoral deeds either, how can there be so many ghosts that come knocking on my door at midnight? Or is there a strange disease that causes nightmares every night?"

An unusual and wicked smile formed on her bright red lips, her eyes slowly falling on the iron wristband exposed on Chang Geng's wrist. There was a sharp glint in her eyes like a pair of poisonous arrowheads: "What else do you know?"

Chang Geng subconsciously pulled back the iron wristband back into his sleeve, as if even a glance from her could taint the object.

"I also know that outside of town two years ago, the wolves that chased after me did not get there by themselves, they were summoned. That is you warning me that I can't ever run from you, that you have dozens of ways to finish me off, right?"

Chang Geng quietly said, "Only a barbarian knows how to manipulate wolves. After we arrived in Yanhui Town, you have been in contact with the barbarians. I have a guess you are also a

barbarian woman. Back then when you locked me inside a cupboard, I saw a man coming in to tear away your clothes. There was a symbol of a wolf on your chest."

Xiu Niang laughed softly: "Barbarians...you actually call us barbarians..."

Her laughter continued to get louder and louder until she was eventually out of breath.

Xiu Niang's sharp laughter came to an abrupt end. She grabbed her chest and coughed harshly. Chang Geng instinctively raised his hand as if attempting to help her, but he retracted it upon realizing his action, his fingers balling up into a fist.

A trace of blood flowed through Xiu Niang's fingers and landed on her soft-yellow dress with a shocking purple-black color.

Chang Geng was stunned. In the end, he stepped forward: "You..."

Xiu Niang grabbed his arm and tried with all her might to straighten her back, shaking like a withered leaf under the cold wind. She grabbed a half piece of a jade pendant at the bottom of her makeup box and pushed it into Chang Geng's hand, bringing together with it all her blood.

Her face was as white as snow, the blood smeared on her lips were more blinding than the lip coloring itself, she glared at Chang Geng with a pair of bloodshot eyes:

"My name is not Xiu Niang, that is the name of your Central Plains's women. I am called Hu Ge Er, meaning *Ziliujin at the heart of the earth*..."

She was choked by her own words. After a painful coughing fit, she spurted out blood, dyeing the front of Chang Geng's robe in red.

"Unlucky....*Ziliujin*." The woman let out an odd cry, her breathing gradually becoming erratic. "My elder sister is the Goddess of Longevity, even the Wolf King worshipped her, you...

"You are the little monstrosity that I raised with my own hands." She gave a dying laugh, "No one will love you, no one will treat you with sincerity..."

She struggled to hold onto Chang Geng's wrist. Her sharp nails pierced his flesh and the iron wristband on the boy's arm: "This is the Yun Pan wristband, a portion of the Black Armor - especially made by those dark demons of the Black Iron Camp, who gave you this? Huh?"

Chang Geng immediately pushed her away as if he had just been burnt.

The woman fell onto the makeup table and curled up, her charming phoenix eyes widening, the whites of her eyes struck terror into one's heart.

"You have the 'Bone of Impurity' that I personally cast on you. I have given it the name of the Chinese dialect, also called 'Chang Geng'.

"Does it... sound good?"

Her face violently twitched, blood and white foam mixed together trickling down her lips, her voice was indistinct, but it did not hinder Chang Geng's hearing.

"'Bone of Impurity' is unparalleled, no one can detect it, no one can cure it... One day, you will grow into the world's most powerful warrior, and will also begin to be unable to distinguish between nightmares and reality... You will become a ruthless madman- "

Chang Geng stood in the same place; he felt that these incomprehensible words could freeze all the bones in his body.

"The blood of the Goddess is also flowing in my chest. I will bless you with the infinite power of longevity. You... In all your life, you will only have hatred and mistrust in your heart. You must be violent and destructive. Disaster will fall down onto wherever you go... All the people in your life will never...meet...a good..."

The word 'end' slipped out of her lips, and the woman's body

spasmed violently. It seemed as if she was struck with something, she slowly turned her head to look at a small scented pouch that hung down beside the bed. There was a totem for peace inside. On one occasion when Xu Baihu came home from duty, he had prayed in a temple outside the city and gave it to her as a gift.

The woman's eyelashes gently trembled, and suddenly it seemed to be filled with tears. The tears washed away the malevolence in her eyes, at that moment they seemed almost gentle. But it was only a moment of gentleness.

Her contracted pupil was like a lamp running out of oil. Death hung in the air. The woman in gorgeous makeup gave her final breath together with the most vicious curse in the world, then with the very last bit of warmth, she heavily fell down.

No one will love you, no one will treat you with sincerity. In all your life, you will only have hatred and suspicion in your heart. You will be violent and murderous. You will bring disaster everywhere you walk. You are destined to pull all the people you knew to their demise.

In the raging fire of the summer evening, Chang Geng stared blankly at the gorgeously dressed body on the makeup table, clutching his blood-covered iron wristband in a daze.

Why did she have to kill herself?

Why did she resent him this much? Why did she have to raise him until now?

... What is the iron wristband of the Black Iron Camp?

In the end, who is Shen Shiliu?

Xiu Niang's curse seemed to have already taken its effect. A child's initial trust for the world came from the love and care of its parents, but this was the one thing that Chang Geng had never experienced.

Even if he was naturally born generous and benevolent, but when forced to face doubt and suspicions again and again, he still only resembled a wounded dog running away with its tail between its

legs.

Even if he longed and yearned for that kind of familial warmth, he would still continuously push it away in fear.

Chang Geng was suddenly struck with a strong urge - he had to find Shen Shiliu. He had to ask this yifu face to face, what kind of grand character was he? What intentions did he harbor?

However, before he could step out from the chamber that reeked of the scent of blood, he was already terrified.

"*That's right,*" Chang Geng suddenly thought, "*From the vast knowledge that sometimes Teacher Shen accidentally let slip out, how can he be just some demotivated student who never passed his exams?*"

Although Shen Shiliu spent day by day idling about, he held the manners of a descendant of noble families. Even if he lodged under one's roof, you will not see from him the slightest hint of poverty... How could he be just an ordinary improper loiterer?

These things should have been clear as day from the beginning, but when he closed his eyes, he inevitably thought of the figure of Shen Shiliu propping his head up with one arm, watching over him when he was ill.

If that was also a false affection —

The old maid who was trying to peek at them saw that the door has opened up. She immediately came over with a smile: "Young master, today..."

Chang Geng looked at her, his eyes red.

The old maid was scared by his eyes. It took a while for her to calm down, she patted her chest and complained: "What are you do —."

She didn't finish yet when she noticed the scene inside the chamber.

The old maid froze in place, then she stumbled back three steps

and fell flat onto the ground. An inhuman screech immediately left her throat.

At the same time, an ear-piercing warning siren suddenly sounded in the city.

No one knew who had released the alarm sound in the tower. The two-foot-tall whistle brought with it white smoke that had been dyed with *Ziliujin* and flew into the sky, its sound resembling water ripples, spreading out for thirty or forty miles, breaking through the peace and quiet of Yanhui Town that had lasted these fourteen years.

Shen Yi was burying his head in fixing steel armor when suddenly, he heard the Shen family's door being kicked open from the outside. Shen Yi raised his head and immediately grabbed the sword that has been removed from the steel armor.

"It's me," Shen Shiliu whispered.

Shen Yi lowered his voice: "The Barbarians have made their move sooner than we thought?"

This sentence was short and low, but the 'half-deaf' Shiliu heard it without missing a word: "There are Barbarian spies on board. On the returning ship was not our people."

Shen Shiliu spoke while moving into his inner chamber without delay. He raised his hand and cut the bed into half. There was nothing under it.

But, a set of dark iron armor was actually hidden under the wooden board.

The hands of Shen Shiliu dexterously opened the dark hidden space on the chest of the steel armor and retrieved a Black Iron emblem. Its cold material cast a cold blue glint onto his fingers.

He promptly turned around his back that was usually strengthless now resembling an iron spear.

The wind blowing outside the wide-open door picked up his light and thin white robes and only brushed past his shoulder as if intimidated by his killing intent.

Shiliu: "Ji Ping."

'Ji Ping' was the name of Shen Yi that has never been called in front of outsiders before. On usual days, the two often bicker over mundane household matters as close as real brothers. Yet, at this moment, Shen Yi took a step back and quickly moved into a kneeling position:

"Your subordinate is present."

"Since they came so soon, we can take advantage of the confusion and conveniently haul in this net - I am entrusting His Highness the Fourth Prince to you. First, escort him out of the city."

Shen Yi: "Roger."

Shen Shiliu quickly grabbed an outer coat and a sword at his bedside, then immediately turned to leave.

T/N: This chapter is °･｡(°｀⌓´°)･｡

***In many accounts, Lucifer would specifically be for morning Venus, and Vesper would be for evening Venus. But in the context of this novel, Lucifer is preferred. Besides, morning and evening Venus is just the same Venus haha*

Chapter 7: Enemy Attacks

—

Chang Geng saw such eyes for the first time, there seemed to be a heavy scent of rust contained in them.

—

On this day, the veteran with surname Wang was in charge of the city defense. He had wasted half of his life here in Yanhui Town. He liked to drink on his downtime, and he would start boasting and telling fib whenever he had had a little too much. He would always say that in the past, he used to follow the Old Marquis to go on the Northern Expedition.

No one could find out whether that was true or not, but it was not impossible. The Old Marquis was still human. He still needed to eat, of course, he would require a servant to take care of his meal.

But no matter how careless he was, Old Wang would never dare to drink on the day of the return of the Giant Kite. Each of the officers must be lined up in turn, and everyone was afraid of being embarrassed.

Unfortunately, what you fear was what you get.

Old Wang looked up at the alarm whistle ascending to the sky and roared hysterically: "Which little bastard's piss does not look at the date and demands to get crazily drunk to molest your wife? Who released the whistle? Do you think this old man is just for show?"

At the end of the dark river, there was a big pool surrounded by an iron net waiting to welcome the incoming Giant Kite. The iron net had already been opened halfway. The little soldier who was in charge of pulling the latch was scared by this sudden alarm sound. Not understanding what was going on, he did not dare to be careless and fastened the latch again.

In the end, the big iron gate was half-opened and half-closed,

just like a big mouth that clamped down onto the dragon decoration on the Giant Kite's head.

The soldiers who were all lined up readily waiting to unload *Ziliujin* from the ship had started to look back and forth in confusion. The Mayor who was responsible for receiving military goods took out a small *tong hou*, directed it at the soldiers who are waiting at the iron gate and yelled out: "Are you all half asleep?! The Giant Kite is stuck, can't you see it?!"

He has not even finished talking yet when a burst of burning fire suddenly flashed on the deck of the Giant Kite. Thick white smoke streamed out, unloading a thick steel arrow the size of an arm savagely flying into the sky. It accurately shot down the loud warning alarm whistle in the midst of a surprised noise of the crowd.

The alarm whistle shut its mouth and died out in the blink of an eye. It stopped in the air for a second and fell straight down. Silence hung in the air for a brief moment, then, it exploded with a loud 'bang!' ensuing chaos.

"*Baihong* Arrow!"

"What happened?! Who shot the arrow? Is the person on board crazy?!"

"What are they planning to do?"

*'Baihong'** is a type of mechanical giant bow. After the whole bow had been fully extended, it would be seven feet long. It could only be equipped onto a large-scale ship such as the Giant Kite. Such a terrifying weapon certainly could not be driven by human strength alone. A mechanism powered by *Ziliujin* was equipped under the bow. An arrow that had been shot from a fully extended bow can pierce through a few feet wide city gate.

*白虹 *lit. White Rainbow*

It was said that when the Giant Kite slid across the sky, the *Baihong* arrows that would rain down from it were like divine punishments that had fallen onto the ground below that even Heavy

Armors could not withstand.

This change came too suddenly. Old Wang grabbed a *'Qian Li Yan'*, stretched out his neck like an old turtle and muttered: "Oh no,... This is not good. Hurry! Go call Master Guo and Tudor Lu, go!"

*千里眼 *means Clairvoyance;*
in this novel, a binocular

He was still speaking when the Giant Kite's flaming wings that had been extinguished suddenly illuminated altogether. The lack of *Ziliujin* caused the Kite to let out a rumbling and exploding sound, like a beast that had been woken up.

Old Wang's eyes widened as he watched the deck of the Giant Kite turned over. A row of strong soldiers donning Heavy Armors started lining up. The glimmer of their armors was like daylight reflecting onto the river's surface. Even across the distance, one could still feel the heavy pressure.

Their leader pushed up the protective mask of his armor, revealing a face covered with scars.

Old Wang was shocked - this was a strange face, how did he get on board the Giant Kite?

Scarred Man suddenly smiled, then he turned his head towards the sky and howled. His howl was loud enough to pierce through the roar of machinery, resembling the howl of a wolf. All the other warriors behind him had started to mimic his action. Howl after howl followed the other like a pack of wolves that had been hungry throughout winter, greedily revealing their deadly fangs.

Among the crowd of people that came to watch the Giant Kite, someone shouted: "The Barbarians!"

These words had poked a hole into the hornet's nest.

The people of the dozens of villages and neighboring cities have all gathered here. Men and women, young and old, now resembled a pack of antelopes, running and fleeing in fright, pushing and shoving, stepping over each other.

Even the horses of the guarding officers were continuously whining as the mass of people pushed through them.

Old Wang stepped onto the watchtower, took out a long spear at his waist, and raised his hand to break open the 'golden box' at the top of the tower. He knew that the golden box contains the *Ziliujin* used for lighting. If he had enough good luck and the fire could be properly ignited, the top of the watchtower could be used as an alarm whistle exploding into the sky.

The veteran who had been telling fib for an entire lifetime successfully stabbed a corner of the golden box, streams of *Ziliujin* started pouring out. He shakily took out an ignition tool. As the howling of wolves rang through the sky, a few sparks of fire broke out and were stuffed into the golden box by his old hands.

Half of the *Ziliujin* in the golden box has leaked out, the remaining half was burnt up immediately after meeting the flame. The ventilator of the lighthouse was blocked. Only a few steam spurted out as if it was about to explode.

In the next moment, another *Baihong* arrow blasted into the air and nailed through the chest of Old Wang. His flesh and blood were split apart in an instant. The momentum of the arrow did not stop for even the slightest, dragging what remained of the old veteran towards the watchtower.

The tower exploded then collapsed from up high. Rubbles fell all over. On the ground, the guarding officers and the commoners started to scatter and hurriedly fled in all directions.

At the same time, the golden box burning at the top of the tower finally surged into the sky, the ominous purple light flashing and exploded into a huge firework in midair, lighting up half of Yanhui Town.

Only now did the commander behind the *tong hou* started to react, and he shouted with all his might: "The enemy attacked! - the barbarians attacked! -"

The Giant Kite that got taken over and controlled by the

barbarians slowly rose from the ground, *Baihong* arrows rained down to claim lives.

The people scattered like flies that had lost their heads, and the city cavalry guards quickly ran past through the bluestone path that was not completely closed.

All the artillery on the tower raised their heads together, aiming at the Giant Kite currently taking off -

The entire city was engulfed in smoke and fire.

It appeared that the compartment for containing *Ziliujin* on the Giant Kite was wide open, and countless Northern Barbarian soldiers descended from the sky amidst the howling of wolves.

The wolves roared; the streets were covered in blood. Everything had been turned upside down.

The man with scars on the Kite leaped and jumped, the steam under his iron armor spurting out violently. His entire body bounced up to more than ten meters high. He landed onto a military horse — of course, it could not support the weight of the Heavy Armor and its front legs were broken immediately. The soldier on the horse got his neck bitten by the savage man before he could react.

The Barbarian raised his head and took a bite out of the soldier's throat. Blood spurted out like oil, ending the soldier's life before he could even cry out.

Scarred Man laughed loudly, resembling a man-eating demon, then swallowed the bitten human flesh. He suddenly whistled, four or five other Barbarians donning Heavy Armors appeared at his signal, sticking closely at his side. They flew quickly across the street and went straight to the direction of Xu Baihu's house.

The military armors were divided into two types: 'Light' and 'Heavy'. The Light Armor was worn by the cavalries and could only carry with it a small bit of power. Mostly still relying on manpower and animal power, its only advantage was its weight.

Heavy Armor was a completely different concept. A set of Heavy

Armor had the height of two adult men and carried a 'golden box' on its back. *Ziliujin* flowed through its joints and limbs. The wearer's feet could travel thousands of miles and could swing a hundred-pound sword with one arm. Its waist was also equipped with explosives. Just a single unit of Heavy Armor could sweep through an army.

If Heavy Armor was available, Cavalry, Navy, and such are not necessary ... But this was not possible. Heavy Armors were immensely expensive. They burn up one box of *Ziliujin* in a few hours which was the estimated amount that could light the watchtower lasting for two years.

Ziliujin was the lifeblood of a nation. One or two golds on the black market might not be able to afford one or two batches of *Ziliujin* with seven or eight parts impurities.

Even a great and powerful nation could only support one branch of force fully equipped with Heavy Armors - the Black Iron Camp of the Marquis of Order - Gu Yun.

Hence, where did these barbarians obtain that many Heavy Armors?

The dead soldiers have no one to answer them.

The old maid who just stumbled out of the Xu's house bumped into this group of vicious murderers. She didn't have the chance to make a single sound when she already got nailed onto the wall.

The savage man drove straight into the inner chamber and shouted: "Hu Ge Er! Hu Ge Er!"

"Hu Ge Er" - Xiu Niang, of course, could no longer answer him.

The carved wooden door was kicked down by the warrior in heavy armor, the door shaft broke apart with a piercing noise then

collapsed completely.

The invincible Barbarian's footsteps finally stopped. He stood in front of the entrance of the woman's chamber blankly.

The light smell of smoke had not dissipated, the room still only had the slightest of light, the long shadow of the tassel hanging on the bed scattered on the ground. The makeup table had been tidied up, and there was a box of lip coloring still open in the corner...

A teenager was kneeling down in front of the bed with his back turned towards him... there seemed to be a figure of a person lying down.

The teenager — Chang Geng — upon hearing such a big ruckus, instinctively looked back. He saw the group of savage Barbarians break into his home in broad daylight yet he did not feel the slightest hint of shock in his heart. He did, however, come to a sudden realization, and could now partially understand why Xiu Niang wanted to die.

These Barbarians were able to enter the city, they must have had relations with Xiu Niang without a doubt. Xu Baihu was still on the Giant Kite, perhaps because she was in contact with the foreigners that he had already been killed by barbarians while onboard. She had successfully avenged her country, but she had also indirectly killed the only man who treated her with kindness.

Chang Geng looked at the Barbarians with indifference, then turned back and bowed to the woman on the bed, expressed his gratitude for not killing him all these years, then completely severed any ties with the deceased.

He bowed until his forehead touched the ground, stood up, then turned to face the heavy-armored warrior at the door.

The heavy-armored man was like a mountain. He was but a child of flesh and blood. Standing among these men, he appeared like an ant that was about to go head to head with a large ancient tree*. It seemed that he should be afraid, but he was not.

**Based on the idiom 蚍蜉撼大树 pí fú hàn dà shù*
lit. an ant trying to shake a big tree

Chang Geng was not so arrogant that he thought he could stand a chance against these many mountains. He was also aware that there was no way he could run from them, yet it was strange that he felt no fear.

Perhaps his fear had all come out at that moment when he knew that there was another identity to "Shen Shiliu".

Scarred Man looked at him — no one could tell what he was thinking of when suddenly, his face was filled with anger: "Where is Hu Ge Er?"

Chang Geng's gaze stayed on his face for a moment then said, "I remember you, you were the man that led a pack of wolves to attack me in the snowstorm from the winter that year."

A Barbarian in Heavy Armor stepped forward attempting to grab Chang Geng when the Scarred Man raised his hand to stop him.

Scarred Man slightly tilted his head down, clumsily bent his back to stare at the boy that didn't even reach his armored chest, and asked again in an accented Chinese dialect: "I am asking you, Hu Ge Er, Xu...Xiu Niang, where is she?"

Chang Geng: "Already dead."

He held onto the iron wristband then stepped out of the way, revealing the lifeless body lying on the bed. There was a trace of black blood on Xiu Niang's lips. Her face was pale white, like a poisonous flower that had withered.

The Barbarians in the yard all kneeled down, crying out and screaming in sorrow.

Scarred Man seemed stunned for a moment. Then he slowly lifted his foot and stepped into Xiu Niang's room. Although the action seemed cautious, the Heavy Armor he wore still left a deep imprint on the ground that he walked on.

The Barbarian went to the window and reached out to lean on the carved wooden bed. He retracted his hand halfway as if he was afraid that his strength could crush the bedpost.

He bent down his waist that was covered in Heavy Armor, the white steam behind him spreading in the small bedroom. The *Ziliujin* inside the armor continued to burn, creating the sound resembling that of a dying beast.

The beast caressed the woman's face.

It was ice cold.

Then, Scarred Man suddenly howled like a wolf that had lost its mate. In the next moment, the Heavy Armor in front of the bed turned at a speed which the human eye could not see, and the stirring white steam spewed out hysterically. A mechanical hand reached out to grab Chang Geng.

Chang Geng's feet were immediately off the ground. There was a sharp pain behind his back. His internal organs felt as if they were knocked upside down as the Barbarian slammed him into the wall.

The wall cracked.

Chang Geng could no longer endure and spat out blood onto the Scarred Man's metallic arm.

He struggled to lower his head and confronted the pair of eyes that were full of killing intent.

Chang Geng saw such eyes for the first time, there seemed to be a heavy scent of rust contained in them.

However, he did not know how, in this situation of disparity between strength and weakness, suddenly there was a burning will sprouting up in his heart and soul. He did not retreat his gaze, but instead fiercely stared back at the Barbarian in front of him.

Chapter 8: Identity

—

Shen Yi: "I am a subordinate of the Black Iron Camp, under the direct command of Marshal Gu."

—

The juvenile's and the murderer's gazes met. The young wolf's fangs had not yet sharpened but it seemed as if his fierceness was naturally born.

This might be a natural temperament. When people were trapped in a deadly situation, two kinds of people would fight back. The first was the type of person who had calculated carefully, or would act out of morality, duty, integrity, or even after weighing the pros and cons, it was the last resort. Their heart was not ignorant of fear, but their conscience or intelligence could overcome this fear. This was real courage.

There was another kind of person who would not think of anything. Everything was based on instinct: instinctively angry, instinctively full of will to fight, even if inside their heart they could vaguely understand that their resistance will lead to more terrifying results, yet they still could not restrain themselves from taking a bite out of the enemy.

At this moment, Chang Geng was undoubtedly the latter, and perhaps the word 'fearful' itself was enough to irritate him.

Recalling those years, it was not just Xiu Niang who had to battle with her conscience, Chang Geng was actually the same. In the end, Xiu Niang did not kill him, maybe because half of the blood flowing in him belonged to her elder sister. Chang Geng did not kill her either, maybe because despite the long years of torment, she was still the one who raised him after all.

The scarred Barbarian seemed to have been stabbed by his gaze.

Raising his massive fist in anger, he had to make Chang Geng shed blood.

Just then, a roar suddenly came from the direction of the door, and a Barbarian who was standing guard flew away and broke down half of the room.

The dark room was suddenly lit up, and intense sun rays started pouring in. Chang Geng squinted his eyes; he heard a blood-curdling scream before he could see any light.

The arm of Scarred Man that was grabbing Chang Geng was cut off mercilessly. Chang Geng's foot suddenly had nowhere to step on, he couldn't help but fall to the side. In the next moment, he was gently embraced by another armored arm.

There were always a few pieces of steel armors that have been dismantled lying around in Teacher Shen's yard. It's just that Heavy Armors were very expensive and were not allowed to be maintained by the Mechanics of the common folks - even an involved individual like Xu Baihu could not.

Only on one occasion, a Heavy Armor was completely done for and was about to be brought to the Generals Slope to be dealt with. Teacher Shen secretly used his connections to request for it to be brought home. He enthusiastically dismantled bit by bit the Heavy Armor that had been around since the beginning of time, then explained to Chang Geng about its inside and out carefully.

Chang Geng still remembered he once said that when someone put on Heavy Armor, one could obtain the power of thousand forces, crushing military horses, pushing down surrounding walls, and if the basics were understood, even children could do it.

However, the toughest thing to do was to not lift a mountain.

The strongest iron armor warriors were those who donned the Heavy Armor and could still pass the finest thread through an embroidery needle.

The iron armor of the man who just arrived was different from

those of the Barbarian warriors. It seemed to be a little smaller in size. The exterior of the armor also did not have that bright silver light; it was dark and not eye-catching at all. He gently patted Chang Geng's back and placed the boy onto the shoulder of the Heavy Armor. He spoke in a hushed tone: "Don't be afraid."

The voice that came from behind the iron mask was somewhat distorted, Chang Geng keenly turned back, thoughtfully staring at the tightly covered surface of the mask.

It was only then that the Barbarians at the door finally reacted; they rushed in like a swarm of bees. With the Scarred Man as their center, they spreaded out in a circle, surrounding the man in black armor and Chang Geng.

The man in black armor had one arm shielding Chang Geng's shoulder, and the other carried a bare 'iron rod', thin steam coming out from the tail of this unsightly bar.

His slashing movement just now was truly too fast. Chang Geng did not get to see clearly - was his weapon really this worn-out iron stick?

Scarred Man broke out in a cold sweat, his face blue. He backed away two steps in caution and spoke in a low voice: "Black Armor, Wind Slasher*... You are one of those demon crows."

* 割风刃: *gē fēng rèn, lit. blade that could cut through wind.* **

Chang Geng wasn't able to react at first. Not long after, his back suddenly stiffened - *demon crow!*

That's right, fourteen years ago, in the Northern Expedition, the Black Iron Camp rushed straight into the northern barbarian savanna. Coming like a black whirlwind, the barbarians resented and feared them and had given them the name 'demon crow'.

The man in black armor did not pay any regard to it and cooly reminded Chang Geng: "Hold on tight."

The Scarred Man screamed, and four other well-trained barbarian warriors surged up along with him. Sword slashed out in

all four directions. A dark purple light flashed under the feet of the black-armored man; he dexterously drilled through the gap of the slashes and leaped on top of the already collapsed roof of the Xu's house. As soon as he landed, though the left shoulder that currently carried Chang Geng remained motionless, the right half suddenly turned at a dazzling speed, the 'iron rod' in his hand appearing like an illusion.

Chang Geng's eyes widened as he could make out that there was a blade at the head of the rod that the man in black armor was using. The whirlwind-like blade slashed down, and the barbarian soldiers who charged forward were unable to dodge. They took a direct hit on the chest and the golden box at the center of their armor exploded instantly, the *Ziliujin* inside burst into a terrifying blaze, blowing up the body of that giant monster into little pieces.

Hot blood splashed onto Chang Geng's face. He controlled himself with everything he had, barely maintaining his unmoving look. His hand clung tightly to the corner of the black armor.

This was... the legendary Black Iron Camp that could pit one against thousands, there was no obstacle they couldn't conquer.

The barbarians recognized the wide gap between their skills and their opponent's, they no longer dared to fight alone. They exchanged looks with each other. At the same time, they ran out of Xiu Niang's chamber, scattered in several directions, and bounced onto the roof.

One person rushed to the foot of the black-armored man, slashing the joints of his legs. One person swung his sword to the man's head, sealing off his escape route. The other one aimed right at the golden box at the heart of his black armor.

After losing one arm, Scarred Man took more than ten steps back. He lifted his other arm, opening the compartment at the front of his metallic arm. A sinister arrowhead was ready to move, aiming right at Chang Geng who was being carried on the shoulder of the man.

These Barbarians have gone hunting together since childhood, surround and kill, their teamwork was unmatched.

Murderous intent soared through the sky, one could feel all their hairs standing upright.

Chang Geng could finally see the iron rod in the Black Armor's hand clearly. When propelled at high speed, the three- to four-foot-long black iron blade was extended out from the end of the long rod, while continuously spitting out fine steam. When running out of power, the sharp blade would travel at top speed and retract back to the other side, one moving and one withdrawing. The blade rotated in a full circle resembling a terrifying meat grinder.

At this time, Chang Geng's feet were suddenly off the ground. The man in black armor had pushed him from his shoulder into his arm. His entire body was pinned to the chest of the armor, bending with it.

Chang Geng was shocked - not counting his weight, the single Heavy Armor alone must be hundreds of pounds already. After bending into this position, all their weight will be pressed onto the lower back of the man in black armor: would it not end up breaking his back?

The man turned his body, made a clean and neat spin in the air, holding Chang Geng and leaping down from the roof, accurately avoiding the arrow that the Scarred Man shot at them.

The light on the Wind Slasher concentrated into a thin line, his movement quick and precise, killing one person, slashing another's legs, then the mechanism inside the leg guard spurted out white steam, pushing the Heavy Armor forward. He had already traveled more than ten feet in the blink of an eye.

It seemed that he could easily handle these Barbarian soldiers, only because he had his hand full with Chang Geng that he did not clash with them for long.

"I will send you out of the city first." The man still spoke with an even tone. "It's too chaotic here, and about your mother... please endure."

Chang Geng leaned on him. He was silent for a while, then he

said: "My mother drank poison to kill herself. She has always had contact with the Barbarians outside the border. Maybe she is their spy."

The man in black armor did not say anything; he didn't seem to be surprised by this.

"You saved a Barbarian's son. It's your loss -" Chang Geng paused, then completely unveiled the identity of the other party, "*Teacher Shen*."

A cloud of thin white steam appeared at the ear of the man in dark-colored armor, then the black iron mask was pushed up, revealing the scholarly face of Shen Yi.

"There was a rebellion on the ship of the Northern Patrol unit," said Shen Yi. "I first thought that the traitor was Brother Xu, but it seems now that Xiu Niang's suicide was partially due to the remorse she felt for her husband. Brother Xu might have already sacrificed for the country, even until the end, he was not aware of any of this. You must also... endure this loss."

"It seems that you have already known..." Chang Geng whispered, "Who are you?"

Shen Yi: "I am a subordinate of the Black Iron Camp, under the direct command of Marshal Gu."

Black Iron Camp's subordinate, under the Marquis of Order Gu Yun's personal command.

Chang Geng's mulled over this sentence several times in his head, and it all felt like a dream - he just learned that he was not his mother's own son, this mother was also a Barbarian spy, and now the old-schooled teacher living next door whose hands were never clean from machine oil was a general of the Black Iron Camp.

Then what about Shiliu?

Chang Geng smiled sadly and thought, even if someone told him now that his yifu was Marshal Gu or even the Emperor himself, he would still be unable to find the strength to be surprised.

"Why is Marshal Gu's general hiding away in this remote area? Why did you save the son of a Barbarian woman?" After asking these two questions, Chang Geng realized that he was about to lose control. He immediately wanted to close his mouth, but unfortunately, he still couldn't stop that last unnecessary extra question from coming out: "Where is Shiliu?"

Chang Geng felt an overwhelming sadness inside his heart at this question. Things have already become like this yet he was still concerned about Shiliu. He was fully aware that *that person* was some kind of grand character in disguise as a commoner, yet he still worried that his eyes were not good, his ears couldn't hear well, would he accidentally be injured in this mayhem, would he be able to find a hiding place...

He even couldn't help but think: *"How come the person who came for me was Teacher Shen? Why was it not Shiliu?"*

The sound of killing and screaming filled the air. The shape of the Giant Kite engulfed Yanhui Town in its shadow, *Baihong* arrows were flying out everywhere creating ghostly imagery. In the distance, someone's house was on fire and the flame spread out quickly. Shen Yi remained stoic, turning a blind eye to everything as he moved left and right, dodging all the stray arrows in this chaos: "Your Highness, please sit tight."

Chang Geng asked in a daze: "What did you call me? "

Shen Yi calmly said: "Fourteen years ago, when His Majesty was patrolling the South, the Royal Consort was pregnant. All alone in the palace, she had fallen into the scheme of wicked subjects. She successfully escaped thanks to the help of her sisters and loyal servants. On the way to the South, they came across the rebellious forces of the commoners. The Royal Consort was already very weak. She had fought tooth and nail to give birth to Your Highness amidst the chaos. In the end, she could never see His Majesty again.

"The younger sister of the Consort took Your Highness and escaped, from then on, all news was cut off. In the past few years, the Emperor had sent countless people to search in private. He always thought that Your Highness has met your demise - only until three

years ago that there were a few small leads. His Majesty had sent us here to welcome you back." Shen Yi briefly explained in a few words, "We were unable to reveal our identities to Your Highness, please forgive us..."

Chang Geng did not know whether to laugh or cry. He felt that Teacher Shen's brain might be filled with oil. He had compiled a story full of flaws. According to him, Xiu Niang was the younger sister of the Royal Consort, if so, then the Royal Consort was also a Barbarian woman?

In addition, if the Emperor sent someone to find his child, why would he send out only two people? Even if the Emperor was extremely poor, with the entire imperial court having numerous magistrates and military personnel, how could they only send two people? And why did the two men not reveal their identity for more than two years?

With these incredible Black Iron Camp's generals living next door, there was no way they did not know that Xiu Niang had been secretly communicating with the Barbarians... Why did they not stop her?

Chang Geng cut him off: "You are mistaken."

Shen Yi: "Your Highness..."

"You have the wrong person!" Chang Geng felt very exhausted, he suddenly did not want to be involved any longer with these people who only knew how to tell lies:

"Let me down, I am just a bastard son born from a Barbarian woman and who knew which bandit, not worthy for the Black Iron Camp generals to put themselves in danger just so I can be rescued, not deserving of having you people as my *yifu*!"

Shen Yi could not help but sigh after hearing that last sentence. He felt that seventy to eighty percent of Chang Geng's words were directed at Shen Shiliu. He just got caught in the middle, and Chang Geng had directed his anger at the completely wrong person.

He gently grasped Chang Geng's leg that was kicking around in frenzy: "Pardon my rudeness - the pinky toe of your right foot is slightly bent compared to normal people, just like His Majesty's, this is unmistakably the dragon's bloodline."

Chang Geng quickly jerked his leg back, his heart getting colder and colder.

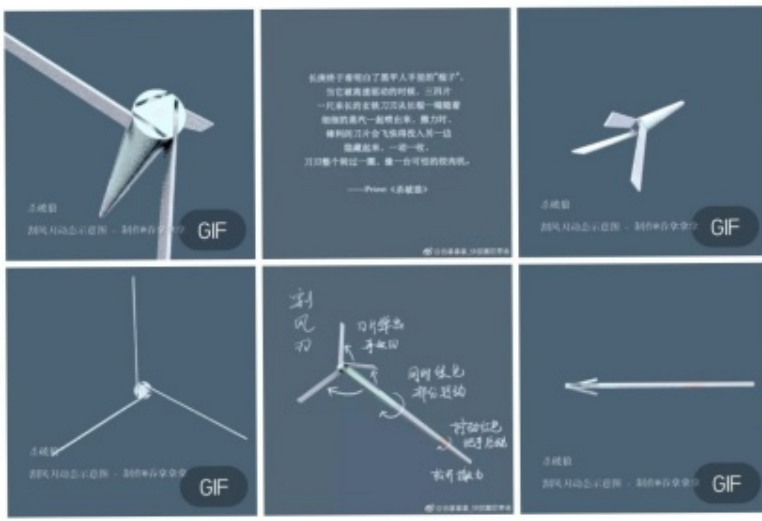
He clearly remembered that this foot was not naturally born looking like this. It was broken by Xiu Niang herself when he was a child. She ignored his crying and screaming, twisted one of his toes then used the method for binding women's feet to bind his toe into deformity.

Dragon's bloodlines bullshit... even this can be fabricated?

***A 3D model has been made by a fan (and was also reblogged by priest on weibo!) here: https://www.weibo.com/1671183143/Ge6oWkRNV?type=comment#_rnd1569463302503*

#杀破狼-priest 看小说的时候就一直琢磨P大描写的各种中式机甲了，按照自己的阅读理解想了下割风刃是怎么动起来的，做了一个非常简陋的效果图！戳开会动！有可能跟P大脑中的完全不一样呢😂@一口獠牙的小甜甜 希望甜甜能看到！以后空下来还会再画画详细点的割风刃设计图，还有玄鹰什么的😘

See Translation



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一口獠牙的小甜甜 <--- priest

04-28 Reposts1515

Chapter 9: Killing Intent

—

Maybe Xiu Niang was right, he was a monster.

—

At this time, a familiar cry reached Chang Geng's ear. He turned back and saw the head of Butcher Ge hanging on the railing together with several pig heads. His wife was pale and blue as she was crushed under the collapsed walls. She had long since stopped breathing. The choked cries of Ge Ban Xiao came from afar, and Chang Geng was taken aback. He didn't have the strength to be concerned about anything else anymore and he subconsciously said: "It seems to be Ge Ban Xiao of the butcher family..."

Shen Yi kept on charging ahead without stopping his feet.

Chang Geng thought he didn't hear it properly: "Wait!"

Shen Yi said: "Your subject was ordered to protect Your Royal Highness to leave the city. There cannot be any delay."

His voice came from behind the iron mask, cold as metal that had been submerged in ice.

Chang Geng was dumbfounded.

The hissing wind grazed past his ears, and sticky cold sweat slid down his spine. Everywhere he touched were dark iron — extremely cold, just like the iron wristband that could never be warm around his wrist.

Ge Ban Xiao often act spoiled, showed all his teeth when he

smiled, and his personality was a little strange and quirky. There was not a single person who didn't love the boy.

Chang Geng suddenly muttered, "Isn't that your student?"

In Shen Yi's eyes, were these students who were close to him day in and day out nothing more than an imperial mission of two years ordering him to be in disguise?

That's right. For the grand characters of the Black Iron Camp, what was one puny Yanhui Town?

What was just one child from a butcher family?

In this world, some people's lives were worth more than others; just because one was lovable does not mean one was valuable.

Of course, Shen Yi was not as cold-blooded as his cold armor, but he was only alone at this moment. His highest priority remained to be to complete this task without fail.

The Western Region had just surrendered, and the entire elite force of the Black Iron Camp was currently keeping guard on that side. They could only afford to bring here a very small fraction of their force. After two years of netting, they must make one precise move and haul in this big fish.

If they could seize it, they would be able to exchange peace and stability that would last a few years for the Northern Border. Otherwise, they will lose all their efforts.

Due to the complexity of this situation, how could he explain everything clearly to this kid in just a few words?

Shen Yi said with all earnestness: "Your Highness please forgive me... Your Highness!"

It seems that while Shen Yi was unprepared, Chang Geng had taken advantage of this brief moment to bend over and touch the lock placed on the elbow of the iron armor.

The Heavy Armor of Black Iron Camp would certainly not be

easily opened by him with just one push, but he did successfully push out Shen Yi's arm, creating a gap of about one inch.

This was the first time Chang Geng had seen a Heavy Armor; he did not know the difference between this expertly-made armor and the copper junks used by the city defense officers.

If someone used such a strong external force to destroy the black iron armor, the force of the pop-up lock bursting out could break down a large tree.

With this one inch, Chang Geng quickly took his foot out and with agility, flipped off from Shen Yi's shoulder.

"I am not 'His Highness'," Chang Geng stood two steps away and looked at him. His face was even more bleak than the black iron:

"My feet are not 'dragon claws' either. It is a deformity that my mother created by using a broken piece of porcelain. If she really is just as you said and have connections with the royal family, perhaps it is her aim to create a counterfeit to confuse the royal lineage. The General is rushing like this, I can see that you have other heavy responsibilities. I am not afraid of death, and I have no intention of stealing royal identity either. I have made this matter transparent to you, I will not hinder you any longer."

Shen Yi's black iron mask was pushed up and he looked at the teenager in front of him in bewilderment.

Chang Geng no longer looked at him, he jumped out over the wall and ran to the direction of Ge Ban Xiao's cry for help.

A set of dark armor could be spotted easily in this tiny town of Yanhui. Shen Yi was surprised only for a brief moment yet a group of barbarians already surrounded him. Chang Geng was not worried. Even though he was an outsider, he could still see that those barbarians were basically seeking death by confronting this expert from the Black Iron Camp. It was clear that although the folklore was somewhat exaggerated in saying that merely forty Black Armors swept through the savanna from that year, it was not completely untrue.

The martial arts that the teenager had been practicing for many years was not just for naught. He was extremely agile as he sprinted towards the narrow road, crossing the courtyard wall. As he came in, he saw a barbarian punching a hole into the chest of an old veteran in charge of guarding Yanhui. The old soldier fell over without making a single sound. It seemed that he could not survive.

Ge Ban Xiao's small face was puffy, holding his head and hiding away in the corner in fear.

Chang Geng saw the sword of the old soldier landing a few feet away. Taking advantage of having the barbarian's back towards him, he stepped forward and grabbed it. The tail of the sword sprayed out a thin stream of steam. It was an 'iron armor sword', but unfortunately it had not been properly maintained for a long time. There was no telling whether it could still be used.

When the barbarian detected the movement, he turned back around instantly but clumsily due to his armor. Ge Ban Xiao's mouth was agape -

Chang Geng twisted the steam support under the steel sword, the sharp blade started to rumble and spin in a circle, a burnt scent filled the air. No one knew how many parts inside were already busted. Cheng Geng almost could not hold on to it, he shouted and slashed the large tree next to him.

Although the squeaky sword resembled metal scraps, it chopped down the tree with utmost ease. Before the barbarian could react, the large tree had already toppled over and crushed him. Chang Geng growled towards Ge Ban Xiao: "Why aren't you running?!"

Ge Ban Xiao's face was cover in snot and tears, he shouted on top of his lungs: "Big brother!"

Not waiting for him to give his long speeches, the man who got crushed suddenly roared, violently cutting through the tree the size of a house pillar and hurled it out of the way. He was like an ox that had been provoked, staring at two vulnerable children in front of him with blood-red eyes.

Chang Geng saw this situation had taken a turn for the worse, he simply had to engage in direct combat now.

He took a deep breath, leaned forward, slightly squared his shoulders, clenched the sword in his hands, and put on a solid starting stance.

It's a pity that no matter how solid his stance was, it was useless. He just stood still when he heard a cracking sound, then the steel sword was completely stuck. It creaked twice, sputtered out black smokes, and immediately became a pile of scrap metals.

Ge Ban Xiao quivered: "This is... this..."

"Move aside!" Chang Geng hissed at him.

Ge Ban Xiao wasn't called quick-witted for nothing. Upon hearing this he instantly became a harmless meatball and rolled into the corner, staying perfectly out of the way.

The barbarian roared; he was about to use this pair of fists to smash this little kid into pieces.

Chang Geng bent his back and avoided the big iron fist that only grazed at the top of his head. He quickly darted through the cracks, passing by the veteran's body, lowering himself and removing the old soldier's steel leg guards with the fastest speed.

At this point, the wind had caught up behind him. Chang Geng hugged the pair of 'steel leg guards' into his arms and rolled over to a small hole under a nearby wall. He immediately put them on his own legs right after he landed, not caring if he equipped them correctly or not.

A crashing noise rang out; the flimsy walls of the commoner's home were not so strong, the barbarian crushed through them with a single punch. Rubbles and broken bricks immediately rained down. The steel leg guard under the foot of Chang Geng squirted a small amount of steam thanks to the leftover *Ziliujin* around the ankle area, propelling his entire body three feet forward in that decisive moment.

Chang Geng almost had the illusion that he could fly up.

Aside from the iron wristband, this was the first time he put a part of the iron armor on himself. In this life and death situation, he desperately tried to maintain balance and grabbed the corner of the remaining courtyard wall.

Ge Ban Xiao screamed: "Be careful -"

The barbarian had violently shaken off the bricks. His iron armor created an unbearable creaking sound. The steam under his feet resembled a cloud. He was somewhat surprised that this little child was quite difficult to deal with. He retracted his iron fists back, the gear in front of his chest turned in a circle, and a dark-colored explosive was aimed at Chang Geng.

Preparing to finish him in one quick move.

Chang Geng had not yet learned how to coexist peacefully with this pair of *feng huo lun** under his legs. Hearing a buzzing sound, he instinctively rushed forward; suddenly there was a painful scorching heat on his back. The sand that splattered onto him from the ground were like steel nails, showering down on him; he only had time to protect his face and head with the scrap-metal sword.

**风火轮; lit. wind-and-fire wheel; In the mythological story Fengshen Yanyi,*
the Immortal Taiyi gave Nezha a wind-wheel and a fire-wheel
to serve as a magic vehicle that helped him fly around.

The Central Plains' iron armors undoubtedly did not dare to equip explosives on the chest area. The powerful recoil from this explosive could shatter a person's bones. Only the sturdy barbarians with their naturally born indomitable strength would dare to do something like this.

Some say that the reason the three major factions of Black Iron Camp could clean through Eighteen Barbarian Tribes that year was because the Man Tribes were underdeveloped and have not yet known how to produce their own iron armor.

Now no one knew where and how they could get their hands on such a huge amount of Heavy Armors. Coupled with the endless

streams of *Ziliujin* underneath their savanna that spread out for thousands of miles, would they still let themselves be dominated like sheep in the hands of Central Plains people?

How horrifying this could become, the young Chang Geng could not afford to think in this moment.

When Teacher Shen... *General* Shen taught him how to take care of iron armor, he accidentally mentioned that the explosive space on the steel armor was limited, and the ice tube for cooling was not so efficient.

In order to prevent the person in the armor from being baked alive, every time an explosive was shot out, there needs to be a cooling period around the time it took to burn an incense, during this period the mechanism for launching from the iron armor was automatically locked. Hence Chang Geng still had room to breathe.

The barbarian screamed in accented Chinese: "Run away, little worm! Scared to death! Run!"

Chang Geng's eyes darkened, he slid down the wall in one swift movement and turned to rush towards the man currently chasing him at a high speed.

The barbaric man was caught off guard. He didn't expect Chang Geng to have such big guts. He instinctively used the long sword to slash him. The Heavy Armor was almost double the boy in height, naturally, there was a blind spot below. Chang Geng laid backward and slid against the ground. The steel leg guards rubbed against the slate on the ground creating sparks that scattered everywhere.

Chang Geng dismissed the steel sword that was done for, smashing it right on the middle of the barbarian's back. The barbarian instinctively dodged. At this moment, Chang Geng pressed down the iron wrist buckle on his wrist, the *Xiu zhong si* inside immediately darted out like a snake, cutting through the Heavy Armor like hacking a watermelon.

Chang Geng: "..."

He merely tried his luck. He didn't expect that the iron wristband that Shen Shiliu threw to him to use as a plaything was actually such an incredible weapon.

The *Xiu zhong si* broke through the golden point of the barbarian's Heavy Armor. The precise Heavy Armor lost its mobility for a moment. To prevent explosion caused by the leakage of *Ziliujin* that could kill the wearer inside, the Heavy Armor activated its self-protection mechanism: all joints from the arms to the back were locked in an instant.

At this time, if the person in the Heavy Armor was still clear-minded, they would use the other half of their body that could still move to first unload the armor, then kill the enemy - even without Heavy Armor, he was still a barbarian man with advantage in height and strength, there was no reason he couldn't deal with these two little children.

However, although the barbarians obtained these Heavy Armors in some way, it was obvious they have not yet learned how to master this iron monster. The moment the Heavy Armor dead-locked, the barbarian inside was completely dumbfounded. His first reaction was wanting to use brute force to deal with this mechanical lock.

How could a human body of flesh and blood, even if naturally born with godlike strength, withstand the force of the Heavy Armor?

He lost his balance and tumbled to the ground.

Chang Geng took this opportunity to make a conclusive move, he did not hesitate to step forward. The steel leg guards under his feet mobilized maximum power. He took aim at the golden box placed near the explosives and stepped down with all his strength.

Even if the quality of the leg guard were much worse, it can still crush a stone of three inches tall when powered up: the golden box immediately cracked.

However, Chang Geng's steel leg guards were also destroyed in the process of hitting the hard armor surface. He used too much force, and some of his strength rebounded back onto his leg. One side

ached to the point of numbing, he couldn't tell if it had already broke or not.

Chang Geng clenched his teeth and turned around with one leg.

Just as he retreated back one step, the smashed golden box exploded, the head of the barbarian blowing up into little pieces on the spot.

Bits of red and white brain inevitably splashed onto Chang Geng. He took his leg back and wiped the blood off of his face with a blank expression. With this horrible stench filling the air, there was no fear in his heart.

Maybe Xiu Niang was right, he was a monster.

At such critical time, Ge Ban Xiao still had his wits about. Even though his entire body was shaking terribly, his brain was still working. He told Chang Geng: "Big brother, let's find a hiding place. I will take you to my father's cellar!"

Chang Geng only took just one step forward but the jolting pain from his leg forced him to cry out and fall over. Upon seeing this, Ge Ban Xiao ran over without delay and carried Chang Geng.

He was still young but his body had gotten considerately large from meat and fat, they shook altogether as he ran, Ge Ban Xiao had soon started panting.

But even when running out of breath he did not delay his pledge of loyalty: "Big brother, my mother and father have been killed by them, you saved my life, I will follow you from now on! I will do whatever you tell me to do! Let's kill all these barbarians!"

His voice broke at that last sentence as he choked out the words between sobs.

Chang Geng's hand couldn't hold on to the busted sword anymore, he let it fall onto the ground with a loud ringing noise. The muscles on his arm were spasming, he struggled to smile and cracked a joke at Ge Ban Xiao: "What am I keeping you around for? Saving for year of famine to bring out to eat?

Ge Ban Xiao: "I can at least wash your feet..."

At this moment, Chang Geng's ear suddenly twitched, he could make out an ominous clicking sound, he immediately shouted out to shut Ge Ban Xiao up: "Shh!"

Ge Ban Xiao: "My mother always said that I am very good at washing feet. My father's feet are even whiter than steam buns when I'm done..."

The voice of Ge Ban Xiao suddenly went quiet. He stopped dead on his tracks then took two steps back in fear.

At the end of the small path, a barbarian donning a silver-colored Heavy Armor slowly emerged.

Chapter 10: Gu Yun

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"Your subject Gu Yun, late to the rescue."

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Chang Geng's lips and teeth won't stop bleeding, he could taste the sweet stench of blood as soon as he closed his mouth.

Ge Ban Xiao ran only a few steps and was already gasping for breath, but this little boy was really aware of his limit. He always held onto the sleeves of Chang Geng tightly, his hands cold and sticky with sweat. Chang Geng, even with his cleanliness, did not pull his hands away. The two children were like two young animals who had nowhere else to turn, baring their small fangs in this dead-end.

At the end of the path, the person raised his hand and lifted the protective mask onto his forehead revealing his handsome facial features.

His cheeks were thin, and there was a shadow in his eye sockets reflecting the land of the Central Plains stretching for thousands of miles. When his gaze fell on Chang Geng, the emotions contained in it were extremely complicated. It seemed to be a little nostalgia mixed with a little bit of pride which made him seem very compassionate.

It was a pity that this compassion did not last long. In the end, it was covered up by deep hatred, resembling a red thread that had been buried in the boundless snow. Although it existed, it had disappeared without a trace.

The roar of the heavy steel armors came one after another, more

and more gleaming barbarian armors continued landing down behind the man. The number had soon reached up to more than twenty.

There was a sudden wind coming from behind, Chang Geng turned back in alert, but a hand pressed down on his shoulder — the person who just arrived was Shen Yi in Dark Armor.

There was even more blood on him now, causing the already dark armor to become even darker.

Ge Ban Xiao was not aware of the situation. His eyes were so wide that it seemed as if they could pop out: "Tea...Teacher Shen?"

Chang Geng turned his head and spat out a mouthful of blood: "That is the General of the Black Iron Camp, subordinate of the Marquis of Order. Don't be rude."

Ge Ban Xiao's tongue suddenly twisted together like a rope, the whole body of meat and fat trembled altogether as he stuttered: "Mar-Mar-Marquis of Order!"

Shen Yi outstretched an apologetic hand towards Ge Ban Xiao.

The hand was as big as the little boy's head, and it was still stained with blood. Ge Ban Xiao instinctively jerked his neck back, but the iron hand only gently patted the back of his head: this touch was even softer than a feather falling onto one's head, not a single hair was damaged.

Shen Yi guarded the two children behind him, standing firm and turning towards the man at the end of the path: "I heard that the 'head wolf' of The Heavenly Wolf's Eighteen Tribes, King Ge Tu, has a talented son named-"

The man coldly continued: "Jia Lai — in the language of you Central Plains people, meaning 'entranced'*"

"Greetings to you Prince Yinghuo*." Teacher Shen supported himself with the Wind Slasher, slowly raising his fist to the front of his chest, using the greeting etiquette of the Man's tribes.

**The word used here was yíng huò [荧惑]*

which was also the Barbarian Prince's name.
Traditional Chinese astrology also calls
the planet Mars as Yíng huò .

The Barbarian Prince asked: "Demon Crow, state your name."

"Just a lowly nameless pawn, not worthy for the ears of royalty." Shen Yi smiled, then asked using his gentle scholarly tone of voice, sounding immensely sensible:

"The Eighteen Man's tribes have been in acquaintance with our imperial court for more than ten years. In the past few years friendship between the two countries has been good. The tributes have been adequate, and business is in good development. The two countries have been at peace, Great Liang has never mistreated you. Yet now you have come without invitation involving defenseless and unarmed civilians in this skirmish. What is your reason for this?"

Ge Ban Xiao was stunned — Teacher Shen this morning still had on a funny apron, scolding as he strolled around the kitchen. Right now as he stood among rows of barbarian men, donned in dark armor, he gave off an aura of *'I will advance even in the face of thousands and millions'*. Completely unshakable.

The Barbarian Prince looked at Shen Yi for a brief second, then let out an unamused snort.

Then, his gaze fell on Chang Geng again, and he proceeded to speak in fluent Great Liang's Mandarin: "I just heard my brothers reported that apparently, there was someone from the Black Iron Camp here in this town. I soon assumed they were only exaggerating. But it really seemed to be true, if so then... the *other rumor* was also true? The son that the Goddess* who was robbed from us by your Central Plains Emperor gave birth to, was he really hidden away here?"

**'Goddess' here is just a religious belief of the barbaric tribes,*
there are no magical or supernatural elements here.

Chang Geng's heart jumped.

The Barbarian Prince looked at Chang Geng only for a moment; it almost seemed like he could not bear to look at him for any longer.

The tall barbarian raised his head slightly. The sky was dark, overcast in layers of clouds, and reflected into his eyes that seemed to contain an abyss.

He whispered to an unknown god in the sky:

"The goddess of our Heavenly Wolf's Eighteen Tribes... is the cleanest spirit on the prairie. Even the wind wanted to kiss her skirt. All living creatures bow their head before her. Where she sings and dances, herds of cattle and sheep will gather the following year, lush vegetation and countless flowers will bloom under the feet of the Goddess of Longevity..."

His voice had a strange rhythm to it, resembling a pastoral song from the savanna.

"This General,..." said the Barbarian Prince. "You people have seized our pastures, hollowed out the heart of the earth, and robbed our Goddess away. Now you ask why we have come, it is truly too absurd!

"Your country's philosophy has lasted since ancient times, educating thousands of people. Did they teach you how to be a thief? Even if you are from the Black Iron Camp, there is only one of you here. I advise you to step aside, give me the bastard child, let him become the fire that will appease *Chang Sheng Tian**, to soothe the grievance of the Goddess that had been defiled. I really... simply can not look at his face!"

**Mongolia's supreme and eternal God,*
referred to as "Chang sheng tian" .
In short, this term is generally just
another way to say "god".

Ge Ban Xiao's heart was in a mess, but after hearing this, he could generally understand parts of the situation: "Big brother, he said bastard...," he coughed, "Is that you?"

Chang Geng was already irritated and he coldly replied: "Can you talk less?"

"The Prince has said things like this..." Shen Yi shook his head helplessly: "Truly a villain who accuses first! It is futile for the two of us to stand here trying to trace back the reason for the Northern Expedition fourteen years ago. If you want to battle, then come forward!"

These words were as firm as a nail. Low walls on two sides of the narrow path were pushed down by two rows of northern barbarian soldiers whose heights were even higher than the wall itself. They divided into two groups, surrounding Shen Yi and Chang Geng in their killing intent.

Shen Yi took a short sword from his armor and handed it to Chang Geng: "Your Highness, be careful!"

Teacher Shen spoke politely, but his hand was sneaky: his sentence was not yet finished but he had already acted first.

The back of the Black Armor spurted out nearly three meters long of steam. The blades from the Wind Slasher in his hand shrieked and darted out like a whirlwind, as bright as a blizzard, and the three barbarian warriors who were closest to him were caught off guard, their golden boxes were crushed all at once, their Heavy Armors instantly deadlocking them in place.

The Barbarian Prince shouted and rushed forward, leading his men by action, bringing with them the stifling hot wind.

Shen Yi did not hesitate to confront his move, and at the same time shouted towards Chang Geng and Ge Ban Xiao: "Run!"

Black Iron Camp's Dark Armors were very incredible, but this might be too incredible — it was said that a set of Dark Armor was lighter than an ordinary Heavy Armor by around forty pounds. Shen Yi originally resembled a gentle scholar, his strength was far less compared to that of the Barbarian Prince. He lifted the Wind Slasher with both hands, although he was able to hold off the thundering clashes of the opponent, his entire body was driven backward.

Two Heavy Armors clashed with each other. Yhe surrounding low walls, courtyards, stone houses... even the thick large trees, nothing was spared: they all came shattering down at once.

The Barbarian Prince screamed: "Leave that little bastard here!"

Several Heavy Armored soldiers responded to his order, snow white steam spread all around, intercepting the two boys whose running legs added up to three.

Chang Geng guarded his chest with the sword, one of his legs was unable to bear any force and had to limp down weakly on the side. His heart was thundering loudly and seemed to burst open, there was a childish and sullen expression on his face, the wolf-like instinct in his blood had all been forced out in the confrontation with the sinister barbarian warrior — regardless of whether or not the so-called "Goddess" truly was his mother, even if it was so, what was this outlandish belief that burns the child to pay homage to his mother?

Ge Ban Xiao wiped his nose in the midst of smoke and dust, he dumbly asked: "Big brother, are you really 'His Highness'? Does that mean we're getting rich?"

Chang Geng: "Rich my ass, they just have the wrong person - we're all going to die soon, why aren't you running yet?"

Ge Ban Xiao held his head high: "I won't run! I want to follow my big brother... Ah, my God!"

Two barbarians flew over, one to the left and one to the right. Ge Ban Xiao who just now was still making a grand speech, one of them have already lifted him overhead and was about to throw him to death.

Ge Ban Xiao with his quick reflexes, his limbs started kicking about in a frenzy, then hugged the branches of a large tree next to him. Inhuman strength suddenly burst out in this situation of life and death, making him successfully clutch onto the tree.

It was a pity that although his strength was 'inhuman', his

trousers were still a piece of mortal cloth. It was ripped apart in one move.

It was unsure if Ge Ban Xiao had a sudden stroke of genius, or was just scared to death. When he saw that his pants were done for, he conveniently pissed on the face of the man.

The barbarian also had his mask pushed up, catching all of it.

He had turned completely mad; he let out a loud roar and attempted to kill this little brat in one sweep of his iron fist, but just then his legs suddenly went out of control. It turned out that while Chang Geng was hiding from the enemies, he saw that he had stood in the same place. Chang Geng took advantage of the situation and took aim, accurately stabbing right at the seam of the leg guard.

The short sword truly lived up to its promise as a product of Black Iron Camp. It was extremely sharp as if there was nothing it couldn't break through. He sharply slashed one of the leg guards on the Heavy Armor. One barbarian lost his balance and stumbled down, directly blocking the way of his companion.

Ge Ban Xiao resembled a little monkey, he jumped off from the tree branch, quickly ran across the rooftop, crossing through walls. He gathered up all the bricks and shouted towards Chang Geng: "Big brother! Hurry get out of the way!"

White mist spurted out of Chang Geng's feet, and it was too late for him to stand up, he could only let the leg guards drag him a few feet away, then a large stone landed right on the steel helmet of the barbarian. The ringing echoed endlessly in one's ears.

Ge Ban Xiao: "You bastards! This is for tearing my pants!"

Chang Geng rolled over in the dirt and soil. As he was struggling to stand up with one leg, there was a sudden force behind his neck: a massive iron hand appeared right out of the sky and pulled his entire body up.

Chang Geng subconsciously reached for the iron wristband, but the barbarian did not allow him to. He was about to smash Chang

Geng onto the wall.

Shen Yi who was currently having his hands full with the Barbarian Prince was completely out of reach —

At this moment, a horse's sharp neighing rang out, a gleaming iron arrow pierced through the sky, broke through the thick steel plate, and directly nailed the barbarian who just grabbed Chang Geng onto the low wall.

The low wall wasn't able to sustain the weight of the Heavy Armor: it collapsed into ruins. Chang Geng who was tumbling down in it suddenly heard a very penetrating sound of eagles in the sky. He looked up: there were two huge shadows hovering in the air, and the eighteen Iron Armors of the barbarians were enveloped inside the range of longbows and iron arrows.

The Barbarian Prince quickly looked up and glared: "Dark Eagle!"

Not far away, one person replied: "Isn't it? Long time no see, greetings from Black Iron's three factions to Your Highness."

The voice was tremendously familiar, it had stunned Chang Geng's entire body. Kneeling down on the ruins of stone bricks and rubble, he looked in disbelief at the man donned in a Light Armor coming over on a horse.

The man wore the lightest type of armor specifically designed for horse riding. The entire suit was only around thirty pounds, it was also called 'lightweight suit'.

He didn't have the protective mask on and even the helmet was casually held in his hand, revealing a face that had mistakenly entered Chang Geng's dream. The cinnabar-colored beauty mark under his eye was blazing.

Ge Ban Xiao who was swaying back and forth on top of the wall almost fell forward on his head. He pinched his own thigh: "My God... Are you not my Uncle Shiliu?"

"Yes that's right my nephew," *'Shen Shiliu'* moved forward without

a care as if he completely didn't take the battlefield in front of him into his eyes. He arrogantly pulled out the Wind Slasher from his waist, pushed the body of the barbarian aside, turned towards the wall and jokingly scolded Ge Ban Xiao. "Little brat, letting *it* hang in the middle of the street like that: hurry and go find a leaf to cover yourself!"

Ge Ban Xiao quickly tried to cover himself in embarrassment.

Chang Geng stared at him intensely, momentarily forgetting where he was.

'Shen Shiliu' caught his gaze, turned over to dismount, then bent over slightly, offering Chang Geng his hand:

"Your subject Gu Yun, late to the rescue."

T/N: tune in next time!! ('｡• ᵕ •｡')

Volume I: Northern Bird Does Not Return [北雁不归] | Chapter 11: Harvested

T/N: This chapter is aaaaaaa!!!! (((o(˚▽˚*)o))) We're officially starting the first book!*

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At this moment, even if someone stabbed him with a sword, he still wouldn't feel any pain.

—

Gu Yun, this person, he was naturally born with not much modesty in him. Although some arrogance and frivolity from his youth have been diluted by the golden sand of the Western Regions, still, his inner essence was like that of a dog that couldn't quit eating shit.

Over the years, either praises or insults from others, he had never paid them any mind.

However, earlier this morning, Gu Yun, bearing the alias Shen Shiliu, was lazily drinking in the kitchen when he suddenly heard Shen Yi say that Chang Geng was studying his calligraphy. In that moment, the emotions swelling in his heart were truly indescribable.

For the first time since he was born, Gu Yun felt frightened. He wished that he could reproduce a few more pairs of ears so he could hear Chang Geng's every word, to hear if Chang Geng thought whether or not his handwriting was beautiful. He secretly worried that he was not skilled enough, and would end up misguiding the child.

Perhaps this was generally the emotion inside every father when they secretly hear their children say *'I want to become like my father in the future'* for the first time?

Shen Yi once asked him, what would he do if Chang Geng resented him?

He had proudly given his reply at the time - but truth was, that was a complete lie.

Grand Marshall Gu calmly and steadily showed up on the battlefield, tried to maintain his composure as he watched his adopted son, looking forward to seeing a little hint of surprise and delight on his face - even if 'surprise' was greater than 'delight' - but unexpectedly, Chang Geng only gave him a hollowed look as if his heart was already dead.

He put on the facade of calm and composure, but inside, his heart secretly pounded.

"Oh no, this time he is truly angry."

There was a certain kind of person, naturally born with benevolence and affection, even after going through many malicious turns of events, would still be able to maintain their goodwill no matter how difficult it might be. Such a person was very rare, but Chang Geng really had this potential.

His life had changed in the blink of an eye. He did not even have time to figure out the identity that was engulfed in dark shadows and yet he was already involved in the chaos of the Barbarians' invasion.

However, despite all his uncertainties for the path to the future, despite the helplessness and anger he felt towards this situation, and even the identities of the Shen family's brothers that were still hidden behind layers of suspicions - he still wanted to save Ge Ban Xiao, he still couldn't restrain the anxiety burning inside of not being able to see *'Shen Shiliu'* anywhere.

Along the way, Chang Geng thought for countless times: Now that the city was infested with mass-murdering barbarians, and

Teacher Shen was currently here, then what would become of his little yifu who took half a day just to walk over the doorstep?

Who would protect him? Who would help guide him out of town?

All of his worries turned into scattered ash the moment he heard two words: "Gu Yun".

Chang Geng suddenly did not know what kind of expressions should he use to face Shiliu — Gu Yun.

How laughable! How could Grand Marshall Gu, whose name was famous across the land, be a sickly man who couldn't see clearly and couldn't hear well? How could he need you to worry about him?

Besides, why did Gu Yun appear in such a secluded and remote location like this? Should the Black Iron Camp be defending the Western Region faraway from here? How could they assemble so quickly?

In the end, was this a surprise attack from the Barbarian Prince? Or have they stepped into the pit that others had dug for them?

These thoughts suddenly exploded in Chang Geng's mind like fireworks, but also just like meteors quietly passing by. He was too weary to think about it any further, it's just that his heart hurt — because after having such silly concerns for so long, it seemed that he just overestimated himself.

Chang Geng had soon known the taste of 'terror' and 'disappointment', he had also felt despair and near-death. It's just that he had never known that even the word 'embarrassment' could actually make one feel that ache as if their guts have been cut into pieces.

Seeing how Chang Geng did not respond and that the rims of his eyes were red, Gu Yun finally managed to find a twinge of guilt from his already rotten conscience. He sighed, then under the eyes of many enemy soldiers, he got down on one knee and carefully removed the steel leg guard from Chang Geng's injured leg. The hand that was

covered in a layer of armor gently pressed down a few times: "The ankle is dislocated, not a major problem. Does it hurt?"

Chang Geng did not say anything.

Although this child usually would throw a tantrum and would get mad at him on weekdays, all of Chang Geng's thoughts always went out to him. But now in this moment, Chang Geng suddenly stared at him with such strange and distant eyes. Gu Yun instantly felt a hint of regret.

But his regret only lasted for a brief moment.

The stone-hearted Marquis of Order quickly thought to himself: "*Everything has already come to this, what good is feeling regret now*."

So with his expression remaining concealed, he leaned down and lifted Chang Geng's injured leg with an indifferent look, not saying a word as he relocated Chang Geng's joint.

Chang Geng trembled fiercely, yet he did not call out in pain.

At this moment, even if someone stabbed him with a sword, he still wouldn't feel any pain.

Gu Yun held Chang Geng up and placed him on his horse. Realizing that he couldn't handle this adopted son, he turned around and bullied the barbarians instead.

From dismounting, coming face to face, and relocating the joint, throughout this series of actions, he did not even lift his head up as if the armed enemy forces surrounding them did not exist. But for a moment, there was no one who dared to act rashly - perhaps, just the word 'Gu' itself on the battle flag was enough to scare these grasslands wolves to death.

The gaze of the Barbarian Prince resembled that of a wolf king staring at a hunter who had murdered his race. Resentment as deep as the sea, and over-alert at the same time.

Fourteen years ago, Gu Yun's own father had slain all the chief commanders of the Eighteen tribes. The Wolf King - and the father of

this Barbarian Prince, now had to walk on two horrible prosthetic legs. This was all thanks to the 'blessing' of Old Marquis Gu.

The Prince wasn't mindless. Something that even Chang Geng, a child whose heart was in a mess could faintly understand, of course, he too had understood full well that the moment he saw Gu Yun, he had lost his advantage.

As if to fulfill his wishes, there was an ear-piercing screech in the distance, and a pale signal tower rushed into the air like a rocket, illuminating the sky like daylight.

Right after that, seven or eight shadows of Dark Eagles resembling black-colored lightning landed on the Giant Kite one after another.

Dark Eagle was the biggest nemesis of the Giant Kite. Those barbarians have some way somehow obtaining loads of iron armors, yet their skills were like that of a beginner. Although they invoked a terrifying image, they could never be the rival to the elite Black Iron Camp.

Gu Yun retracted his ever so calm eyes and spoke in his special tantalizing and provocative tone: "How is that fallen Wolf King Ge Tu doing? Are his bones still firm and strong?"

Shen Yi, even in a face-to-face confrontation, always remained sensible and cultured, bearing the demeanor of a greater nation. The barbarians' prince had not yet been able to adapt to Grand Marshall Gu's speeches and almost vomited blood from pure anger: "You ..."

Gu Yun: "I heard some time ago that the Prince of Eighteen Tribes has very grand ambitions, even creating the 'Gold* Erosion' plan. I'm telling you, Your Highness, you want to swallow Great Liang at your level? Watch out or you will soon burst your own stomach!"

**The 'Gold' being referred to in 'Gold Erosion' is the Ziliujin*

This time, the expression on the Barbarian Prince's face truly changed.

The 'Gold Erosion' plan was the topmost secret of the Heavenly Wolf sect. It was also a plan that Prince Yinghuo personally came up with after he took over leadership.

The iron armor and steam technology of Great Liang were advancing by leaps and bounds. The Heavenly Wolf sect had missed their opportunity in this respect. In more than ten years they have been beaten to the point of having no room left to breathe

Even if it was an unrivaled warrior with the strength to lift a mountain, in the face of the newly-reformed and perfected Heavy Armor and Iron Eagle, it was similar to throwing an egg against a rock.

The Prince was very clear in this regard; wanting to take vengeance by purely relying on direct combat was nothing more than just an absolutely idiotic dream.

Unless Great Liang was corrupted from both inside and out.

Although Great Liang was vast in lands, there was no large-scale *Ziliujin* mine. *Ziliujin* was the lifeblood of a country. There must be absolutely no mistakes. Therefore, the imperial court explicitly prohibited private reselling. The offenders were treated the same as those who plot rebellion. If they were caught, a sentence ordering the execution of nine generations was nothing new.

For all kinds of machinery used by civilians that required firepower, it must be accompanied by a letter of guarantee from a scholar or a government official in charge of the local regions and the likes, while the highly respectable individuals within their area could purchase *Ziliujin* a grade lower at the stores of the imperial court.

However, *Ziliujin* was immensely profitable; it could not be stopped even after repeatedly banning black markets. There was a saying - 'birds doomed by food, human doomed by wealth'. The amount of desperate people who were willing to exchange their lives to earn money have been numerous since ancient times. But even if they were willing, if there were no sources to provide, it was still useless.

The earliest black market's 'gold merchants' all went to the grassland to try their luck. But not even one in a thousand of these people could have a single stroke of luck, most of them already died halfway.

The Heavenly Wolf sect aimed for Great Liang's black markets, they did not hesitate to kill the chicken to take the eggs. Every year, a large amount of *Ziliujin* was dug up. After paying their tributes, the extra *Ziliujin* was used to bribe the soldiers and officers in the border areas, bringing them down one by one. This was the 'Gold Erosion' plan.

This plan was slowly started to put into action about seven or eight years ago. Later, the barbarians got in touch with Hu Ge Er, who was currently living then in the small town of Yanhui. The two sides assisted one another. After many years of paving the way, the Barbarian Prince was quite confident: in this crucial town of the Northern Frontier, there is not a single corner where his hand could not reach and his eyes could not see.

But even if Heaven and Earth knew of this, the culprit himself knew of this, then how did Gu Yun know?

Did he really possess eyes that could oversee everything?

In just a span of just a few sentences, the fight for the Giant Kite in the air had been settled with no delay.

The wicked Gu Yun with both hands behind his back was still not satisfied and proceeded to stab at them one more time:

"Your Highness, I'll tell you the truth, this Gu have been waiting for you for a long time in this godforsaken place, having nightmares about you not coming every single day – If you don't come, what excuse would I use to clean up these insects eating up royal wages and doing nothing? Truly, thank you!"

The Barbarian Prince looked as if he wanted to tear him into pieces. Gu Yun saw that he had almost turned mad from anger. The irritation from his powerlessness of being unable to deal with Chang Geng just now finally subsided, he then revealed a smile.

"Gold Erosion, haha, truly brilliant - no more talking nonsense: capture them!"

After that, Gu Yun took up the rein: "Your Highness has been made frightened, allow your subject to walk the horse for Your Highness."

Chang Geng tried with all his might to stare at the man, but no matter if his gaze contained swords and spears in them, Gu Yun remained completely indestructible... similar to how he always could not hear when Teacher Shen told him to wash the dishes.

Chang Geng lowered his voice: "The Marquis did not bring even one servant, came all the way out here to this isolated and secluded area. Truly, this scheming must be exhausting!"

Back then even when he was consumed in anger, he still did not have the heart to say a single hurtful word to Shiliu. Right now as this mockery came out of his throat, it's already tormenting Chang Geng to death, the hand that was gripping onto the reins turned blue.

"Angry to the point of not acknowledging me anymore." Gu Yun thought to himself with some concern. *"What should I do?"*

He had always been an expert in starting a fire, whoever he touched will blow up, but he was not well versed in putting out the fire. Every time he attempted to reconcile, no one knew why others would always become even angrier.

Gu Yun patiently softened his voice and explained: "For military reasons, I failed to reveal my identity to Your Highness, I have offended you. And for taking advantage of the little Prince on numerous occasions before... I hope that after we return, you wouldn't tell on the Emperor....."

He did not even finish talking when Ge Ban Xiao on the wall suddenly shouted: "Be careful!"

No one knew when the barbarian who was hidden in the ruins of rubbles suddenly pulled the propulsion of his steel leg guards to the extreme, and rushed behind Gu Yun's back in a blink of an eye,

roaring in rage as he slashed down with a sword.

Chang Geng who was on the horseback caught sight of this. All his pains and grievances have vanished instantly. In desperation, he instinctively rushed forward and stretched out his arms, trying to block the long sword for Gu Yun:

"Yifu!"

Gu Yun's feet spurted out a line of white mist. The Lightweight Suit and the Heavy Armor were not at all the same. Even a little movement could make people feel as light as a bird. He mounted on the horse in just a flash. Chang Geng only felt a tight force around his waist, his back slammed into the thin layer of armor on Gu Yun's chest, then a dark shadow flashed across his vision.

The blades inside the Wind Slasher in Gu Yun's hand had not been unleashed yet, it still had the shape of a smooth and black iron rod. But the sharp tip has already plunged into the shoulder of the Heavy Armor with incomparable precision. The mechanism on the shoulder of the Heavy Armor was suddenly cut off. The iron arm of the barbarian made a piercing noise, then deadlocked: the long sword that came slashing down was hanging in the air.

At this time, the distance between the blade and Gu Yun's forehead was less than three inches.

And he did not even blink.

Gu Yun pressed on the warhorse's belly with his heel. It let out a loud neigh and jumped up. The hand that was hugging Chang Geng's waist slowly moved up, covering the eyes of the boy. The Wind Slasher's blades surged out as the horse charged forward. Steam spurted out violently, creating a small explosive noise, and the three-foot-long rotating blade was unsheathed, cutting the barbarian man to pieces from the shoulder up.

A damp, warm steam sprayed on Chang Geng's neck. He was puzzled for a brief moment until he smelled blood.

The scent of bitter medicine that seemed to absorb into Gu Yun's

body was buried deep under the Iron Suit. Unable to detect it, Chang Geng felt as if the man sitting behind him right now was a stranger.

His little yifu seemed to have never existed.

Chapter 12: Old Affairs

—

Shen Yi glanced at the mint leaves that had been made bald by the goat surnamed Gu, then chased after him.

—

The barbarians have mustered up all their strength, have gathered all the Heavy Armors they have in possession to launch a surprise attack on Yanhui town; it could be even said that they have risked their old lives for this. The Heavy Armor forces that even Great Liang struggled to support, imagine what this concept would be like to the Man's Eighteen Tribes?

Perhaps even after 'wringing out the grease' would still be far from enough, they must scrape down to the bone and marrow thrice.

Naturally, as their race was one that grew up sharing the same nest with wolves, they were well-versed in the arts of combat. Considering their long-planning and Heavy Armored forces, as expected, they should be invincible.

Unfortunately, they clashed against the Black Iron Camp.

The Black Eagle took back control of the Giant Kite, and Dark Armors captured the Barbarian Prince alive. Under the acquiescence of Gu Yun, they have slain all the remaining fallen forces in the city. The sun has not gone down and yet, the battle was already over.

Still not done, after Gu Yun has finished handling foreign enemies, with the speed of lightning, he immediately turned his forces over to his own side. As the name of the renowned Black Iron Camp was still striking fear in the hearts of many, he had arrested all the military personnel of Yanhui town and Chang Yang gate from big to small: there were more than sixty people in total from the first line of the Northern border.

There was no discussion of right or wrong, they were

immediately put under imprisonment waiting for trial. The people of the Northern Frontier were momentarily in a state of fear.

Chang Geng and Ge Ban Xiao were temporarily arranged in the house of Yanhui Town's Governor, Master Guo. Master Guo was quivering as he saw Gu Yun, fearing that he'd be implicated.

Only after hearing the order of taking care of the little Prince that he knew he had escaped. He really did not dare to neglect; he had sent two rows of servants to line up in front of the quarters Chang Geng was staying in to listen to his every call, the only thing missing was for him to come over himself to serve the tea and pour the water.

Thanks to Chang Geng, Ge Ban Xiao got to enjoy the royal courtesy.

When the little meatball calmed down after the chaos, upon realizing that his home and family were now destroyed, he immediately broke down in tears. Halfway through crying he suddenly remembered that Chang Geng was just like him. He was all alone, even though he still had his yifu as a relative, but Uncle Shiliu was nowhere to be seen and he didn't come by once to visit. Misery loves company, he couldn't help but feel sympathy and was embarrassed to make a ruckus in front of Chang Geng.

But without crying, there was nothing else for him to do. Ge Ban Xiao counted his fingers trying to make clear of everything in this situation, but eventually, he gave up. This was all too complicated for him, his thoughts ended up in a mess no matter how he tried. He asked Chang Geng: "Big brother, they said your father is the Emperor, does that mean Auntie Xiu is the Empress?"

Chang Geng was holding half a *Xiu zhong si* in his hand. When he saved Ge Ban Xiao, he had shot out one of the *Xiu zhong si* in the iron wristband, then he secretly took it back when they cleaned up the battlefield.

As for anything created from metal, sharp and durable were difficult to coexist. The *Xiu zhong si*, although it could cut through iron with ease, it was not very durable and strong: the tip has been

folded when it hit the barbarian's Heavy Armor, the hot *Ziliujin* had melted a corner of it. Even the blade was gone. It was now only a bare and dark piece of metal.

Chang Geng used a nail to scrape off the raised place on the knives, while casually replying to Ge Ban Xiao: "The Emperor's sons are not all born from the Empress, he has a dozen of wives. Moreover, Xiu Niang belongs to the Man's Tribes, and I am not a Prince either, the barbarian woman only wants me to feign being a Prince."

Ge Ban Xiao: "..."

The little son of the butcher's family, after listening to this answer, understood things even less now. His mouth was agape in confusion for a moment. Then he felt that his big brother was very pitiful. Even birds and animals all around have parents, only Chang Geng couldn't figure out his own roots. His heritage resembled a confusing mass of threads that couldn't be unraveled. There was no telling who they really were.

Ge Ban Xiao vowed: "Big brother, you can rest assured, whether you are the son of an Emperor, or the son of a Mayor, or even the son of a Singer, you will always be my big brother!"

Upon hearing this Chang Geng first dryly smirked, then perhaps this line had touched him inside, he finally revealed a little smile.

Ge Ban Xiao: "It would be great if I can enter Black Iron Camp in the future..."

Chang Geng did not have time to answer as someone outside the house suddenly said: "Unlike regular soldiers, the soldiers of the Black Iron Camp must do very harsh training regiment every day, can you endure it?"

The two boys looked up and they saw Shen Yi pushing the door in.

Shen Yi has replaced the terrifying black armor and reversed back to the poor scholar who talked lengthily like a mother-in-law in

the blink of an eye. The word 'poor' was written all over from head to toe. He placed two food containers on the table: "Midnight meal, eat up."

Master Guo paid great attention to health, their dinner only consisted of very watery soup. The adults can make do, lacking a few bites don't make that much of a difference. But how could two young boys endure this? Ge Ban Xiao drank three bowls of chicken noodle soup, yet he still felt like he was only full on water. After opening the food containers and saw that there were real steam buns and real meats inside, he immediately rushed forward with a cheer, even Black Iron Camp or White Iron Camp were all thrown to the back of his head.

However, this little boy truly knew his manners; even when forgetting the world, he would still not forget his big brother. He first took a large steam bun from the box and brought it to Chang Geng: "Big brother, you eat."

Chang Geng glanced behind Shen Yi and saw that the person he wanted to see did not come. He suddenly lost his appetite, waved his hand in disinterest, and tried to suppress the feeling of loss in his heart, then tiredly greeted: "General Shen."

"I dare not accept the honor," Shen Yi took one look at his face and immediately knew what he was thinking. He calmly sat down and explained: "There are major inspection and cleansing at the border area this time, Grand Marshall cannot clone himself, still he harbors immense concern for Your Highness. He had especially asked me to come visit."

"I do not dare to accept *'His Highness',"* Chang Geng bowed his head and said coolly, "Shil— The Marquis is busy day-to-day with military affairs yet he still has the heart to remember us, it is truly flattering."

Shen Yi laughed: "If Grand Marshall knows that you're being rather distant like this behind his back, he would definitely be very sad. Unfortunately, this person, he has never spoken out despite how upset he might feel, and always caused more trouble for us underlings. "

Chang Geng did not say a word in indifference, he seemed to have placed his entire mind onto what was left of the blade in his hand. He carefully selected a position on top and started to drill a hole in it with a nail.

His heart was as clear as a mirror, he frankly did not believe Shen Yi to be just any ordinary subordinate. Even if they were patrolling in disguise, would an ordinary subordinate dare to command the Marquis of Order to wash the dishes or to cook some porridge? Unless one was an undying being trying to hang oneself - already tired of living.

No one was speaking, and the atmosphere momentarily became very uncomfortable.

Shen Yi was smiling on the outside but cursing on the inside as Chang Geng's expression was all completely for Gu Yun to see. However, Gu Yun, that bastard, did not dare to even look and pushed him over here to be his scapegoat. He thought: *"From the day I got on the same felonious boat with that Gu, nothing good would ever happen."*

Shen Yi was born from a prestigious and influential family, there were some connections with the family of Old Marquis Gu's mother so to speak. When the Old Marquis was still alive, he had welcomed Shen Yi to live in the Gu family for a while. All of Gu Yun's grand mischievous deeds from childhood, half of them were Shen Yi's 'merits'.

Later when Old Marquis Gu and the First Princess both passed away, the two went their separate ways. Gu Yun entered the palace to inherit his royal status, Shen Yi went back to partake in the imperial examination. But even after passing the exam, he had refused to enter the Hanlin Academy*. Instead, despite others looking upon him as if he was a madman, he personally inquired to enter 'Ling Shu'.

**The Imperial Hanlin Academy, from the Tang dynasty, lasting until the year of 1911*

The Ling Shu Institute* did not exist to diagnose sickness or to

brew medicine. They do not fix up the human body, they only fix up machines. They ranked equal to the Imperial Guard, directly under the command of only the Emperor himself, was the largest debt collector of the Ministry of Revenue, and also the parents who fed and clothed the military forces.

**the word used for Institute was 院(yuàn)*
which could also be used for hospital,
that's why there's the joke of them not existing to cure humans

'Kite', 'Armor', 'Cavalry', 'Light Suit', 'Eagle', 'Chariot', 'Cannon' and 'Dragon': the seven primary military arms, from the equipment design blueprints, to improvements and upgrading, and even the secret mystery of the Black Iron Camp, they all came from Ling Shu Institute.

The Ling Shu Institute often used 'Imperial Mechanics' as a self-deprecation and a display of modesty. They almost never spoke up in the imperial court, appeared like they were not very high-ranking. They spent all of their time hiding away inside Ling Shu Institute, burying their heads in handling iron stuff.

But no one dared to compare them with the craftsmen from the common folks who made a living by machine oil.

The reason why Gu Yun was able to restart the Black Iron Camp was not only a matter of a measly letter of emergency from the Emperor. To a large degree, this was thanks to his old friend Shen Yi who had assisted in creating a relationship with the Ling Shu Institute. In the key moment, they have stood behind this young general, and provided him with the most advantageous support, making the military power that had been degraded for ten years once again overwhelm the talkative scholarly magistrates.

After the Black Iron Camp died and came back to life, Shen Yi was invited by Gu Yun to leave the Ling Shu institute and to become an exclusive assistant of Gu Yun. These messy matters, with Chang Geng's knowledge and experience at this time, of course, he would not know.

Shen Yi also did not intend to explain them either, he just looked

up and asked Ge Ban Xiao: "I have a few words to discuss with His Highness, you..."

Ge Ban Xiao smartly replied: "Yes, yes, you both continue, I always get drowsy when I am full. I should go back to sleep now."

He gathered up two big steam buns and a pig's feet then jumped off the chair and ran out.

In the room, there were only the two of them left. Shen Yi slowly spoke: "At that time when the war situation at Western Region became stabilized, Grand Marshall received a secret decree from the Emperor: he ordered him to travel to the Northern Frontier to search for Your Highness, the Fourth Prince, who had disappeared together with the Consort sisters from that year."

Chang Geng's movement stopped for a second, he raised his gaze and looked at Shen Yi without saying a word.

Shen Yi's expression was sincere, not a hint of being disingenuous could be found:

"When we approached Yanhui Town, we found signs of barbarian activities outside the city gate. The Wolf King's son has always been very ambitious, he had never intended to be just a subject.

"Grand Marshall was concerned about the threatening change that could occur to the Northern Frontier and had stopped to inspect the situation, he just happened to meet Your Royal Highness in the midst of wolves.

"Fourteen years ago, during his childhood, Marshall was often with the First Princess and had the chance to meet with the Consort once. When he saw you he instantly felt that you looked quite familiar, up until we sent you back to Yanhui Town, and upon seeing Xiu Niang, only then did we confirm that you are the Fourth Prince we are looking for."

"Fourteen years ago, Marshall was just a young child, Xiu Niang had long forgotten him. At first, we originally intended to show our

identities and pick you both up to go back to the capital. We did not expect to accidentally discover that Xiu Niang was in secret communication with the barbarians. In order to avoid affecting the grand scheme of things, Marshall Gu secretly transferred some men from the Western Region to here, plotting to turn their plan against themselves.

"This time, the eighteen tribes' elite forces are all defeated. Their Prince was also captured, and a large amount of financial resources have gone to waste. At least we can protect the peace and stability for the Northern Frontier this year. I hope that Your Highness would take the lives of thousands of civilians living in the border to heart and not blame Marshall for being deceitful."

Chang Geng listened, pondered for a moment, then nodded as this was all fair and reasonable: "Alright."

Shen Yi instantly felt relieved, he smiled and spoke: "That year when the Heavenly Wolf tribes bowed down to Great Liang, they have given two treasures of the savanna to His Majesty: one was *Ziliujin*, the other was their goddess. The goddess is of exalted status, touched by their sincerity, He had made her the Royal Consort, and was also the only Royal Consort of our imperial court.

"And as for other matters, your subject have already told Your Highness before. If the Royal Consort in heaven can see that you have grown up so well like this, she will be very pleased."

Chang Geng sneered inside. According to Shen Yi, then wouldn't it mean that Xiu Niang - Hu Ge Er was his real blood-related aunt? The Aunt was already like that, how much nicer could his real mother be?

Chang Geng: "I personally think that according to common sense, this story should be that after the Royal Consort discovered she is bearing a bastard son, she had risked her life trying to escape and wanted to get rid of the child inside with a bowl of abortion medicine?"

Shen Yi: "..."

The many secrets of the royal palace were inconvenient to go into precise details, but the thing was, this kid had guessed it completely right.

After all, Shen Yi had also mingled with the aristocrats since he was a child, whatever his thoughts might be it absolutely would not show on his face. He immediately put on a surprised and tensed expression, as good as real:

"Why would Your Highness speak of such words? If it is because of Miss Xiu, then you don't have to dwell too hard on it. In the end, Miss Xiu was still a foreigner, if her heart still goes out to her own people, that isn't anything to blame her for.

"Not to mention, in the past few years, despite harboring hatred inside, she still worked tirelessly to raise Your Highness, and she has even managed to send half a piece of the jade pendant back to the capital to inform. It must have all been done as a preparation for her to die for the country, to not implicate Your Highness. Could one still say that this was not driven by familial love? Even your aunt is like this, how can your real mother not love you?"

Shen Yi momentarily paused, then continued: "The appearance of His Royal Highness and the Consort's were like being carved out from the same mold, but your personality is just like His Majesty's, how could this biological relation be made up? As for Miss Xiu breaking Your Highness's toe, I believe there must be some other hidden matters inside, or perhaps because Your Highness was still too young back then hence why you could have remembered it wrong, these are all possibilities."

Teacher Shen's talk was reasonable and extraordinary eloquent, if Chang Geng was not aware of this poison inside his body slowly causing him to turn mad, he would probably get persuaded by this made-up story and truly believe that Xiu Niang had worried about him with all her heart.

He could no longer fully trust in other people's stories. He would always harbor stacks and stacks of questions and skepticism. He couldn't help but break down other's every sentence to mull over, and as he took a deeper look, they would always be full of doubts.

Chang Geng suddenly felt very exhausted.

After a period of finishing burning an incense, Shen Yi held a face that had gone stiff from smiling and was sent away by Chang Geng.

Chang Geng sent Shen Yi to the door: "Before, I was still unaware, thinking that Marquis Gu's health was no good, and often go on to be lengthy about it. I ask that the Marquis will forgive me."

Shen Yi lowered his eyes and could only see Chang Geng's head as Chang Geng had refused to look at him. He let out a sigh and left the small quarters where Chang Geng lived. As he exited the gate and turned towards the small trail, he caught sight of the 'busy with military affairs' Gu Yun sitting outside in the courtyard's small flower garden.

The courtyard of Master Guo grew a lot of mints. Gu Yun was sitting in the small pavilion alone, with nothing to do he started to pluck them up, putting them in his mouth, then ended up chewing and swallowing them as time went by.

There's no telling how long he had been sitting alone here, the batch of mints had almost gone bald because of him like a goat has ravished this place.

Shen Yi lightly coughed, but it seemed Gu Yun had not heard him at all. Only after he had come closer that Gu Yun squinted his eyes and recognized him with difficulty.

"Did the effectiveness of the medicine wear out?" Shen Yi sighed.

Gu Yun was confused, instinctively making a gesture signaling he could not hear.

Shen Yi had to go forward and get closer to him: "Let's go back first, I'll tell you more about it there - give me your hand, there are stone steps."

Gu Yun shook his head, refusing his help. He took out a Liuli Glass* and placed it on the bridge of his nose then slowly went out without saying a word, even his two beauty marks seem to have

faded in color.

*琉璃镜 *(Liúlí jìng, lit. colored glass lens); the monocle Gu Yun wears*

Shen Yi glanced at the mint leaves that had been made bald by the goat surnamed Gu, then chased after him.

Chapter 13: Apology

—

This man surnamed Gu might think that he was coming to apologize, but unfortunately, no matter how one would look at it, it appeared as if he came especially to pick a fight.

—

Gu Yun actually stayed right next door to Chang Geng, but unlike Chang Geng's place, the place where he settled seemed quite cold.

If Chang Geng said *'No need to serve'*, Governor Guo would surely and shamelessly praise *'His Royal Highness' heart goes out to the people'*, then proceed to send over dozens of servants.

However, even if he acquired an enormous sack of courage, Master Guo would still not dare to speak of a single flattering word in front of Marshal Gu.

Gu Yun casually sent out an order of *'Don't come to bother'* where he lived. Except for the scary Black Iron Camp soldiers, no one dared to come in for even half a step.

In situations where he could not see well and could not hear, Gu Yun would become extremely agitated and tense, and would especially hate having unfamiliar people hovering about.

Shen Yi had not seen him so rigid in a very long time, as if every tree and bush was an enemy soldier. He had thought that perhaps by hiding away in the small town of Yanhui for two years, Gu Yun had learned how to peacefully coexist with this vague concept of common life. But it seemed to be impossible after all.

The one who learned to live in peace was just 'Shen Shiliu' alone,

not Gu Yun.

In fact, Gu Yun, this person, although he usually bore the demeanor of confidence and calmness, truth was, eight to nine parts of it were false, but his acting was simply too real that no one could see through them.

At the same time, although his blindness and deafness were all real, they seemed like just an act.

From this point of view, Marshal Gu had set an example upon himself to embody the saying 'true could be false, false could be true'. Shen Yi did not know whether he was really missing something inside, or if it was intentional.

Ah yes, his heart was also sincere and genuine, but it seemed that not many people were convinced either.

Near the evening, when the night had just started to fall and the twilight stars had not yet revealed themselves, the first thing Gu Yun did after returning to his chamber was to turn on all the lights.

Then he took off the *Liuli* Glass, rubbed his eyes hard, and said to Shen Yi: "Get me my medicine."

Shen Yi was a refined and mannered broken mouth. Apart from fighting in battles, his side job was to ramble; he went on with practiced ease: "Grand Marshal, thirty percent of the medicine was still poison. When in no extreme emergency, I believe you should drink as little as possible..."

Gu Yun stood under the lamp with his expression remaining unchanged, his gaze was a bit dazed and he did not respond.

Shen Yi closed his mouth — he remembered, at this distance, Gu Yun cannot hear him.

Gu Yun's deafness was a trick to restrain all the broken mouths. One hit was sure to kill, all these years it had never failed once. Shen Yi had to silently turn around, and go to the kitchen to brew the medicine.

The *Liuli* Glass was very flimsy, pressed onto either side of the bridge of the nose. With just a slight change in temperature, it would condense a layer of white fog and completely block the line of sight. It was also quite fragile and could easily damage the eyes when it breaks. Overall, it was very inconvenient for military officers. But if it's just in one's own home, it's still alright to put on in case of urgent matters.

After Shen Yi came out again, Gu Yun has re-framed the glass on the bridge of his nose, whetted the ink, and began to write his report.

Although Governor Guo was only a small official out in the border, his living condition was not at all poor. The lamp on the table was not just an ordinary oil lamp, but it was a steam lamp which brightness could be adjusted. Judging from the complicated lace design, it might have been bought from the hands of the people from the East.

There was also a Western clock next to the steam lamp, and although it was a fake product, it seemed as good as real. If inspected carefully, there were fine marks on the top to indicate the 12 earthly branches, the 10 heavenly stems, and the 12-hour period of the day. The upper left corner also had a small window with the 24 solar terms alternating. This object seemed to be neither fish nor fowl. The lower part of the clock was transparent, gears with sizes of large and small pushed forward. Gu Yun hated this thing as the gears were very noisy when turning; he had considered telling people to take it out.

But it didn't matter at the moment, he could not hear it either way.

When Shen Yi came back with a bowl of medicinal soup, Gu Yun had just finished writing and placed his brush down.

Gu Yun: "Look over it for me to see if there is anything wrong."

The steam lamp was dazzling, there was a row of Western women showing their chests on the lampshade, all of them were posing in a way that revealed each and every detail, Shen Yi used his hand to shield the light and whispered: "How vulgar."

Then he quickly read through Gu Yun's report and sighed: "If there is anything *wrong*? Marshal, please pardon this Shen's humble skills and shallow knowledge, I don't see a single thing that is *right* in this."

Gu Yun: "Huh? What?"

Shen Yi: "..."

He picked up Gu Yun's report by the corner, stuffed it back into Gu Yun's arms, gently held his elbow, and pointed to the small couch next to him, indicating that he should just go hang out over there. Then Shen Yi spread his own paper, dipped his brush in ink, and tried to start writing a new one.

Gu Yun took the medicine bowl and downed it in one go with enthusiasm. He leaned on the delicately carved couch, did not even take off his shoes, then crossed his two legs up high and quietly waited for the medicine to take effect. At the same time, his hands did not stay idle — Gu Yun's ten fingers swiftly folded the previous report into a paper bird, then took aim at the back of Shen Yi's head.

How much of a bastard can this man be!

Shen Yi heard the sound of the wind and caught the paper bird with his hand. Truly admitting defeat this time, he asked Gu Yun: "Can you hear me like this?"

"It's alright, still a little fuzzy," Gu Yun said. "Either way you could rephrase what I have written down before accordingly and make it sound nicer for me."

Shen Yi sighed: "Marshal, you want to tell the Emperor that it is the Fourth Prince himself who had seen through the conspiracy of the Barbarians, and had set aside familial love, thus providing us with the opportunity to exterminate them in one fell swoop? Would you believe something like this?"

No one knew what type of panacea Gu Yun had taken, the two small beauty marks under his eye and on his earlobe seemed to have come back to life, shining bright red once again.

"And if not?" Gu Yun asked: "Otherwise are we going to tell His Majesty that I have wanted to dominate Great Liang's military forces for a long time now, that the Western Regions' situation had just settled yet I'm already plotting to take over military control of the Northern Frontier, and I have soon taken advantage of his order to protect the little Prince to run off to trap the Barbarians?

"Or should we say that I have secretly dipped my hands into the prohibited *Ziliujin* black markets which have been repeatedly banned, and accidentally discovered that the amount of *Ziliujin* that flowed into these markets in the recent years is abnormal?"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun proudly spoke: "You can round it up and make it sound more believable, otherwise what would I need you for? Moreover, having that unfortunate mother, Chang Geng, that kid, after we return to the capital, he will likely be harassed by those old bastards. You need to dress it up nicely for me, say that the Fourth Prince had led a dreadful life but despite going through many trials and hardships, his heart of sincere loyalty to the country had not been diminished. You must make it heart-wrenchingly sad, as long as His Majesty breaks down crying as he reads it, let me see who would dare to talk."

Shen Yi: "... "

Gu Yun had just made him coax the Prince. Now he wanted him to make the Emperor cry.

Shen Yi sneered and put down the brush: "Pardon this Shen for not having enough ink inside for this, Marshal should go and inquire another expert then."

Gu Yun: "Ah!"

Shen Yi tilted his head and saw Gu Yun playing victim with not even a hint of shame whatsoever:

"My head hurts. It hurts, hurts, hurts, *hurts* enough to explode — Brother Ji Ping, besides you, there is no one else who will help and

support me, how can you have the heart to abandon me like this? This lonesome and desolated mortal world is truly heartless, what else should I live for?"

Then he clutched his chest and fell over on the small couch in a coffin position and played dead.

... saying your head hurt, then what were you clutching your chest for?

Rows of blue veins popped up on the back of Shen Yi's hand.

However, after a while Shen Yi still reluctantly sat down again, spread the paper, carefully considered every word and sentence, and modified Gu Yun's report.

After Gu Yun 'the corpse' had lied down, he did not come back to life again, because his head actually did hurt. Shen Yi also knew that this was the medicine's side effect.

After drinking this medicinal soup, there was a period as long as an incense burning time wherein his eyes could see crystal clear and his hearing was extremely sharp. When this time period was over, the headache would start to kick in, and even just opening his eyes would feel as if his surroundings were spinning. The sounds all around him echoed both near and far.

This symptom would slowly be relieved after about half an hour. Afterwards, his eyes and ears could temporarily function like normal people.

How long could he stay normal? That would be hard to say.

When Gu Yun took this medicine for the first time, the ache was painful enough for him to beat his head against the bedpost. Afterwards, as he was able to see and hear clearly for more than three months, it almost made him forget that he still had two nonfunctional body parts.

And as he used it more and more frequently, on one hand, he had acquired the skill to fall asleep no matter how painful his head would become, but at the same time, its effectiveness seemed to be

slowly wearing out.

As of right now, a single dose could only be effective for about three to five days.

"*It might become completely useless in a few years...,*" Shen Yi thought.

The two - one sitting, one lying - did not speak a single word. It was only up until the night was dark and the sound of night patrol could be heard in the distance that Shen Yi had finally put his brush down. He turned around to pick up a blanket and covered Gu Yun.

Gu Yun still kept the same sleeping position as before when he fell over, completely motionless. Only his brows were slightly crunched together, his lips and cheeks were pale white as if there was not a trace of blood. Still, his two beauty marks continued to shine.

Shen Yi looked at him, then carefully walked out.

The next day, as Marshal Gu woke up, he had reverted back to the Marquis of Order bursting with energy once again.

The day was still not bright yet Shen Yi was already stirred awake by Gu Yun. He answered the door with still drowsy eyes, only to see a very enthusiastic Gu Yun: "The stuff I commissioned had finally arrived. Just you watch, when I bring this to apologize, I guarantee it can completely soothe the anger of that little brat!"

Shen Yi blinked hard, suddenly there was an ominous premonition rising up in his heart.

The Marquis ordered four Black Iron Camp soldiers to move a large box the size as big as a house post, then marched over to Chang Geng's place with vigor. When passing by the patch of mints that he had wrecked the night before, Gu Yun picked another leaf and put it in his mouth, not caring that its sharp edge was digging into his lips, he blew a melody that he invented himself, as if to declare from afar

that he had descended for a visit.

As a result, one of his foot had just entered Chang Geng's courtyard door when he was immediately greeted with a murderous long sword flying towards him. The servant nearby carrying a tea tray screamed out in fright, the tray and everything on it shattered to pieces as it dropped onto the ground.

Gu Yun's wrist fired a blade the size of a palm in an instant. Suppressing the sword Chang Geng was holding, its whole body slipped out like a fish. The two sharp edges came in contact, creating a sound. However, after Gu Yun flexed his fingers, Chang Geng's wrist suddenly went numb and he nearly had to let go of the long sword, forcing him to retreat.

Gu Yun retracted the blade back to the wristband, and with both hands behind his back, he smiled and said: "What had irritated Your Highness so early in the morning? No matter, you can put all of your anger on your subject."

Chang Geng: "..."

This man surnamed Gu might think that he was coming to apologize, but unfortunately, no matter how one would look at it, it appeared as if he came especially to pick a fight.

Chapter 14: Breaking the ice

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In short, Marshal Gu who excelled in the art of 'mentioning things that should not be mentioned' had once again successfully delivered.

—

The sky was not yet bright but his big brother was already doing sword training. Ge Ban Xiao had already prepared a mouthful of sugar-coated praises. Unexpectedly, this already happened before he had the chance to; he was scared to death as he stood motionlessly on the side, not daring to breathe out.

Chang Geng seemed like he did not sleep well. His face was pale and his eyes were slightly twitching. After taking a deep look at Gu Yun, he slowly lowered the tip of the sword and restrained his voice: "I had greatly offended the Marquis with my blunder."

Gu Yun rubbed his chin, trying to restrain himself from laughing.

He raised his hand attempting to put it around Chang Geng's shoulder just as before, but the boy avoided it as expected.

Chang Geng said coldly: "Marquis, please come inside."

Gu Yun retracted his hand with a bit of embarrassment and placed it on his lips, covering it up with a cough: "Chang Geng, wait."

Hearing Gu Yun call his name, Chang Geng's footsteps subconsciously stopped, only to see Gu Yun turn around and wave his hand. The few people who were carrying a box immediately stepped in and placed it on the yard, took one step back, and lined up into a row then got down on one knee.

"Marshal."

Gu Yun reached out and signaled for the soldiers to get up, then personally stepped forward to open the lock on the box. With his hand placed on the complicated looking lock as if tempting little children, he turned around and told Chang Geng with a mysterious smile: "Come, I have something nice to show you."

The lid of the box popped open with a creaking sound. Ge Ban Xiao pulled on Chang Geng, but upon seeing how silent he was, he couldn't help his curiosity and stepped forward himself to take a peek, then immediately cried out in surprise.

Inside the box laid a silver-colored Heavy Armor. There was no variegation in its whole body, the lines and curves were almost dazzling, stunningly beautiful. Compared with this one, the Heavy Armors that the Barbarians have obtained seemed nothing more than loads of heavy metal lumps.

Gu Yun said with a hint of pride: "This was custom-made by the master from Ling Shu Institute a while back. The efficiency of the *Ziliujin* firepower is twice as high as other Heavy Armors. The joints have a reinforcing layer and will not become stuck by just one piece of *Xiu zhong si* unlike those junk of the barbarians. This is a masterpiece, much better than the one I used when I was young, but it still has no name... You should be at the age where you have your own name already, you should leave your childhood name for this one."

Chang Geng, except for the light that reflected from the armor flashed onto his eyes, had no other expression on his face. Especially, after hearing Gu Yun suggest that he should give the Heavy Armor the name 'Chang Geng'.

He didn't know since when had the name 'Chang Geng' become so popular. Xiu Niang - Hu Ge Er, Gu Yun, they all seem to favor this childhood name.

The enemy who carried the status as his mother gave him a dose of poison that could cause insanity before her death, naming it 'Chang Geng'. The yifu that he had wanted to use the rest of his life to take care of before it had all turned into bubbles, now gifted him with this astounding Heavy Armor, also suggesting that he named it

'Chang Geng'.

Was there any more irony than this?

In short, Marshal Gu who excelled in the art of *'mentioning things that should not be mentioned'* had once again successfully delivered.

Chang Geng's long silence had made the people around him uneasy. Ge Ban Xiao stepped over and reached out to gently tug on his sleeve: "Big brother, are you not going to try it on? The first time I saw Heavy Armors was from the group of barbarians that day..."

Chang Geng suddenly bowed his head then turned back inside the house without a word and shut the door with force.

The smile on Gu Yun's lips gradually became a bit bitter. He appeared quite self-conscious standing at the entrance of the courtyard, but he quickly steadied up again and laughed at himself to find a way out: "First time being someone's yifu, not quite good at it. How embarrassing."

A sergeant in Black Armor came forward and asked: "Marshal, this armor..."

"Put it...um, just put it outside his quarters and leave the key behind for him." Gu Yun briefly paused, appearing like he was going to say more, but in the end, he was still discouraged: "Forget it."

He had donned a casual attire the color of indigo, thin and flimsy; his figure was not entirely sturdy either. He had put in a lot of effort trying to please the boy but ended up touching matters that should not be touched. Staring at the tightly shut doors in front of him with sorrow, he gave off quite a pitiful image.

Shen Yi witnessed this situation, and could not help but curse: "Aren't you usually so arrogant? Looks like you have kicked right at an iron pole this time. Serves you right!"

Ge Ban Xiao felt a little uncomfortable, awkwardly scratching his head: "Uncle Shiliu..."

Gu Yun patted Ge Ban Xiao's forehead and smiled reluctantly:

"It's nothing, you two run along and go play."

He later turned and walked over to Shen Yi, dragging him quite far out in the distance then whispered: "Wasn't he very happy the last time when I gave him the iron wristband? Why did it not work this time?"

Shen Yi looked around and saw that no one was within their earshot, he then bluntly said: "Grand Marshal, do you think he is made of wood? So that you could use the same trick every time?"

Gu Yun was a little anxious: "Cut the sly remarks, then what do you think I should do?"

Shen Yi's eyes widened: "Just look, you have done all these grand deeds in the Northern Frontier, yet you hid them from him for how long. He had treated you with all his heart, but what about you? Now he still thinks that you were just pretending to be blind and deaf to fool him, not to mention the mother that had raised him from a young age turned out to be a spy from the Man's tribes, who is also gone now and could have been indirectly killed by you..."

"Bullcrap," Gu Yu interrupted him, "This sort of fiend from the savanna undoubtedly ended her life knowing for sure her grand scheme had come to fruition. If she knew that I was here, she would surely realize that they stood no chance, like hell she would go die ."

Shen Yi pondered on his words, he could not make out any relation to karma in this sentence, he could only hear the key point - *'the hero of the world, if not me, then who is?'* from Marshal Gu's words — what is this *'knowing that he is here, I now understand that I have no chance'*?

Simply hopeless.

Shen Yi did not pay him any mind, he replied just for the sake of it: "Just give him some room, let him have some peace and quiet for a few days, don't run over with these 'coaxing mistresses' tricks to bother him. Just let him get himself together."

Gu Yun: "I don't have a mistress ."

Shen Yi sneered: "That's right, you don't even have a wife."

Gu Yun kicked him.

However, after two steps, Marshal Gu realized that this matter happened right on time - he simply did not wish to return to the capital right now.

But escorting the little Prince, they could not stay in Yanhui Town forever. He briefly considered it, then suddenly had a sly idea.

Gu Yun said to Shen Yi: "Just in time, the report written last night still have not been sent out, you go back and change it, say that the Fourth Prince harbors genuine filial piety. Although it is hard to accommodate both loyalty and filial piety, in the end, he had placed righteousness before his own family, but afterwards, due to excessive sorrow, he ended up bedridden with a severe illness. We are resting in Yanhui Town for a while, waiting for His Highness' body to recover then return to to the capital. It must be written reasonably and sensibly, strive to make the Emperor break down in tears."

Shen Yi: "..."

If in any chance he could defeat him, he would personally make this Gu break down in tears.

It was a pity that a human's calculation could not be compared to that of God's.

The next day, as Gu Yun was watching Chang Geng practice his sword on top of a wall, a Black Eagle suddenly arrived with an urgent gold medal order. Just one look and Gu Yun's expression immediately changed.

The Emperor was currently in critical condition; he had summoned the Marquis of Order to bring the Fourth Prince back promptly.

Gu Yu turned over and jumped off from the wall top. Chang Geng could faintly hear him speaking to someone outside the courtyard wall: "Tell Ji Ping to come see me, we are to return to the capital immediately."

Chang Geng was bewildered; leaning on his longsword, he could sense unforeseen circumstances coming.

All of Great Liang thought of him as this Fourth Highness, except for himself.

Chang Geng always felt that his identity was quite insulting. If he really was a prince, whether it was purebred or hybrid, either way, should the true dragon bloodline be there to shelter him?

How did it turn out like this?

But then again, whether he belonged to the royal family or that of a beggar's, he had no say in this matter.

Ge Ban Xiao was observing and noticed that Chang Geng's mood was not very good, he immediately smiled and said: "Don't worry, big brother, I will always follow you, if you are a general, I will be your bodyguard; if you are a magistrate, I will be your assistant; If you are an Emperor, I will be your eunuch- ... Ah!"

Chang Geng covered his mouth and glared: "How can you speak of such nonsense? You don't want to live anymore?"

Ge Ban Xiao's small pair of mung beans eyes went left and right.

Chang Geng's darkened mood suddenly improved a lot. Even the little boy of a butcher's family was unaffected. If he continued to wallow in anxiety, wouldn't that mean he's completely incompetent?

Chang Geng thought: "*I should just run for my life then, as there was utterly no burden. I should run deep into a mountain's forest and be a hunter. No one could ever find me again.*"

However, if he decided to run, he must first leave Shiliu... *Gu Yun* behind. As he started to entertain this idea, his insides started to hurt too much as if it was being cut into pieces; he had no choice but to temporarily set these thoughts aside. But as soon as he did, going with the flow, Gu Yun was already escorting him on their way back to the capital.

Ge Ban Xiao already made up his mind about following him. The

boy who grew up in the countryside has chosen the path of the capital thousands of miles away. Buy one, get one free — the next day as they were about to set off, Chang Geng was looking at Cao Niangzi who was now donned in men's attire, but no matter how one looked at it, he still resembled a girl who crossdressed.

Cao Niangzi mustered up his courage, trying to force his voice: "Big brother Chang Geng, you have saved my life in the river that day. My father said that as a man, one must not be ungrateful: I must repay you with my life."

Upon hearing the *'as a man'* part, he already had goosebumps. After hearing *'repay you with my life'*, he suddenly felt his stomach ache. He replied dryly: "It's not necessary."

Cao Niangzi's ears were bright red, he shyly said: "I... I just want to go to the capital with you, to stay beside and serve you."

Chang Geng wanted to refuse at first, but as the words were about to leave his lips, they slipped back down into his throat. In his impression, Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi were his two little tails. They barely ever spoke a full complete sentence to him, one could not say that there was any kind of friendship here, but once he left Yanhui Town, suddenly these two little children would become all the memories that he had of this place — Shen Shiliu not counted.

Chang Geng hesitated for a moment, then turned his head and asked a soldier: "This brother... would you mind inquiring the Marquis about this?"

The guard's reply came quickly: "Grand Marshal said this is all up to your decision."

Chang Geng gently let out a breath; as he thought, such trivial matters, Gu Yun would not pay them any mind.

Bringing along Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi, Chang Geng mounted on his horse, then turned around and took one last look at the small town of Yanhui.

Giant Kites had once returned to this place, with crowds of

people lining up on both sides welcoming them back. Although ridden with poverty, life here had always been happy and peaceful.

Now, as the fire of war had swept through them, the whole town seemed to have fallen into a shadow. In the distance, only the sounds of crows could be heard.

There was an indescribable sensation in Chang Geng's heart — he felt that those happy and simple days would never come back again.

The powerful Black Iron Camp rushed back to the capital in the same way as the marching of an army. Even energetic young children were completely exhausted after a few days of traveling.

When the army set their camp down for resting in a valley, in the midst of haziness, Chang Geng had a nightmare completely different than usual. He dreamed that he had a steel knife in his hand, and pierced it through the Gu Yun's chest, blood started spurting out. His face was as pale as paper, his eyes darkened and gaze scattered as they slowly lost their focus, a thin stream of blood flowing down his lips.

Chang Geng shouted *'yifu!'* out loud and sat up in fright. Soaked in feverish hot sweat, he subconsciously touched his chest.

Chang Geng had flattened the scrape on the ruined *Xiu zhong si* and noticed some detail about it. The traces left behind by the *Ziliujin* burn looked like some kind of a pattern, resembling clouds; he then drilled a hole and wore it on his neck.

This *Xiu zhong si* had helped him kill a barbarian. Chang Geng believed that as he had seen blood, he could no longer be regarded as a child. He was now qualified to be a real man, hence he wore this blade on him at all times.

His fingers touched the ice cold piece of black metal, gradually calming Chang Geng down.

He slowly spat out a suffocating breath, then moved to exit his tent. The night guard immediately wanted to follow after but he

refused.

Chang Geng went alone to a small river. As he was washing his face, he heard the lively noises of insects on the grass. He reached out his hand and caught a small cicada.

Antares*(1)* would soon fall, signaling the beginning of the cool autumn; the lifespan of this little thing was coming to an end. Chang Geng felt that this creature was very pitiful and let it go. He aimlessly strolled along the riverside when he unconsciously arrived at Gu Yun's tent.

**Antares is the modern name of the ancient Chinese fire star(流火 liúhuǒ). It is associated with end of summer.*

He came to then mockingly smile to himself, but just as he was turning to leave, he suddenly saw Shen Yi rushing in, holding a porcelain bowl in his hand, a very familiar medicinal scent spreading out.

Chang Geng's nose twitched, unable to make another move.

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T/N: Goodbye Yanhui town... we will be back one day. Lots and lots of feels next chapter...

Chapter 15: Night Talk

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"Yifu was wrong, all right?"

—

It was difficult for Chang Geng to regard Shen Shiliu and Gu Yun as the same person.

Shen Shiliu was simply just some improper man from the border town, spending all his days wandering and idling about, not working for a living but also being a picky eater who was immensely difficult to please. He was genuine and true yet repulsive at the same time.

But Gu Yun was not.

For most people in this world, 'Gu Yun' might not be an individual. He was more like a symbol; an incredible being with three heads and six arms, exceptionally skillful and talented.

In a grand nation that encompassed thousands of miles, there could only be one person like Gu Yun.

Not only Chang Geng, but for Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi, when discussing this matter, they also felt as if they were only dreaming.

It's just that Chang Geng was different from his two little friends. After all, Shen Shiliu was not their yifu.

Chang Geng did not resent Gu Yun for deceiving him. After all, he was already surrounded by deception since the day he was born, adding one more into the midst did not make that much of a

difference.

Besides, what could the Grand Marquis of Order obtain by deceiving a poor orphan boy like him?

Generally, it could be said that it was because of Xiu Niang's blessing — who forged him this false identity — that such a lowly character like him could have the chance to meet with the Marquis of Order in his lifetime. The man even lowered himself down to 'trick' him, there must be other reasons for it.

It's just that for Chang Geng's affection — two parts went out to his home country, two parts were given to Xu Baihu who seldom came home. The remaining six were all for his little yifu. But now that Marshal Gu had caused his little yifu to disappear, those six parts of affection fell to the ground in vain and shattered, hollowing out a large pit in his heart, the bleeding spreading out all over a vast expanse.

But at this moment as Shen Yi brought in the medicine this late at night, Shen Shiliu and Gu Yun — two separate figures that should be on two completely opposite sides — suddenly and unexpectedly overlapped with each other.

After a while, Shen Yi came out with an empty bowl. Chang Geng heard him notify the soldiers guarding outside the Marshal's tent: "You all keep watch here, don't let anyone come in and bother him."

Chang Geng hesitated for a moment, but proceeded to step closer as if he had been pushed forward by an invisible force.

After many days of traveling together, Gu Yun's personal guard certainly recognized him. But due to Shen Yi's instructions, he had no choice but to move forward to stop him: "Your Royal Highness, Marshal is feeling somewhat uncomfortable today, he has already taken his medicine and gone to bed. If you have any business please command your subject, I can do it in your stead. "

The man who he used to live next door to and could easily find without even knocking on the door, now Chang Geng had to trouble

others just to have a glimpse of his face.

Chang Geng bowed his head, his voice seemed dyed with loneliness: "This brother..."

The guard immediately knelt down: "I don't dare."

"No, no, I don't mean it like that." Chang Geng quickly waved his hand then smiled helplessly. After a moment, he sighed: "It's just that back in Yanhui Town, I used to bring him medicine. I only wanted to take a quick look, if it really is inconvenient, then I..."

He could not speak anymore. Chang Geng made up his mind, deciding that if he got rejected again this time, he would not humiliate himself any further.

Unexpectedly at this time, another guard came up and whispered in his ears: "Didn't Marshal instruct that there was no need to inform him if it was His Highness who came to visit? Don't be so stubborn."

Chang Geng was sharp, of course, he could hear this. He raised his head in surprise, momentarily not understanding the emotion in his heart. And just like that, he was allowed in.

The scent of the medicine had not evaporated, the bed curtains were left open, a figure of a person laid there silently.

As he moved a little closer, Chang Geng discovered that Gu Yun still hasn't slept yet.

Perhaps due to the headache, Gu Yun's fingers were pressed tightly against his temples, a deep scowl between his brows; he did not notice that someone just came in.

Chang Geng cleared his throat from a few steps away, then gently called out: "Mar..."

He only just made a sound but Gu Yun, who was lying on the bed had instantly risen, he pulled out a sabre hidden inside his blanket, unsheathed for about three inches. Chang Geng could not even afford to blink his eyes when the sharp blade of the sword has already been placed against his neck, its coldness climbing up on

him. The person holding the sabre resembled a vicious dragon that had just been awoken.

Chang Geng was shocked by his killing intent and was forced to blurt out:

"Shiliu!"

Gu Yun tilted his head, after a brief moment he narrowed his eyes and seemed to recognize Chang Geng, he vaguely said: "Sorry."

He put the sabre back into the blanket then gently rubbed Chang Geng's neck: "Did I hurt you?"

Chang Geng was startled, just as he gathered himself together again, a suspicion started to rise up inside: *Could he really not see?*

But he immediately cast this impossible thought aside — how can the Marquis of Order be a blind man?

Gu Yun searched for an outer coat and carelessly draped it on his body: "Why have you come here?"

But he toppled as he tried to stand up due to dizziness, ended up half-sitting, half-fallen onto the bed. Gu Yun sucked in a deep breath and held his forehead with one hand, the other was pressed onto the bedside for support.

"Don't move." Chang Geng subconsciously reached out and caught him.

He hesitated for a moment, then bent down and lifted Gu Yun's leg up, tucked them back on the bed and properly pulled the blanket up for him. While avoiding the mess of long hair that scattered around, he supported Gu Yun's shoulder to help him lie down. After finishing this series of actions, Chang Geng dumbly stood there for a while, he suddenly could not find any words to say, only a stiff question came out of his lips: "What happened to you?"

Gu Yun's medicine was starting to take effect, he did not expect Chang Geng who was 'throwing a tantrum' would suddenly come for a visit. He could only reluctantly endure the headache and the sounds

echoing near and far in his ears.

He had intended to send Chang Geng away first, he laughed casually: "Made a little ungrateful brat that doesn't acknowledge me angry — pardon me, Your Highness, could you fetch me my wine bottle?"

According to his experience, in a situation like this, drinking some wine might be able to make it more bearable.

Chang Geng frowned and looked at him with suspicion.

Gu Yun's head was aching as if being cracked open, he lied: "Shen Yi's medicinal wine can help cure migraine."

Chang Geng was fooled easily, he went to grab the bottle that was hung next to the Light Armor suit.

Gu Yun tilted his head and downed half of the wine in one go. As he almost finished the whole bottle, Chang Geng quickly held on to his wrist and took the bottle away by force: "Enough, don't drink so much even if it is medicinal wine."

The strong wine flowed into his stomach like burning fire, the blood in his whole body boiled up. Gu Yun let out a breath and felt that his sight was clearer now. It's just that he started to get a bit dizzy from drinking too fast. The two had nothing to say for a moment, and after looking at each other for a while, Gu Yu could not hold on. He leaned on the bed and gently closed his eyes.

His intention to send Chang Geng away was made crystal clear, even Chang Geng himself understood that he should leave, but his feet seemed as if they were rooted in one place.

Chang Geng mocked himself on one hand: *"Even if you feel worried it would all still be meaningless, just be sensible and leave now."*

But at the same time he involuntarily reached out and pressed the acupuncture point on Gu Yun's head.

As he continued, he felt that he himself was despicable and low, yet he could not stop.

Gu Yun's forehead was cold, and except for the frowning of his eyebrows at the beginning, he did not express any other opinion, he simply let Chang Geng do as he pleased.

It was only until Chang Geng's hands felt a bit tired that he whispered, "Do you feel better now?"

Gu Yun opened his eyes and looked at Chang Geng silently.

The so-called 'even the wise can be wrong at times, and even the fools can at times be correct' under the influence of wine — Gu Yun was able to say something sensible for once. Looking at Chang Geng for a while, he suddenly said:

"Even after we arrive at the capital, yifu will still be here to protect you. Don't be afraid."

Chang Geng was completely stunned. Under the dimly lit light, he seemed to tremble greatly.

Forced to mature so soon at this age, when knowing full well that he had nowhere and no one to rely on but himself, he would only clench his teeth and force himself into a calm and restrained adult.

But, in the face of just the slightest bit of warmth that he had always longed for, the tough and brave exterior fell apart and revealed the soft and fragile child inside.

Gu Yun stretched out a hand towards him: "Yifu was wrong, all right?"

He didn't know how this sentence had penetrated through the young boy's cracked heart; perhaps not all of it was sincere, because for the most parts, Gu Yun never thought that he was wrong. Even if his conscience spoke up occasionally, it was not necessarily that he knew where exactly it was that he was wrong.

His gentleness and indulgence brought by the wine had given Chang Geng a way out.

Chang Geng held onto his hand tightly, like grabbing the last

life-saving straw. The shoulders that had stiffened for many days suddenly fell down, he almost broke down in tears.

He now realized that what he had been waiting for all this time was only these two simple sentences, as long as that person said to him *'yifu was wrong, yifu still needs you'*, it was enough for him to know that even after the Xiu Niang who abused him no longer existed, after losing Xu Baihu whom he did not even had the chance to see again one last time, in this world there still existed this one bit of warmth left for him... then he could forgive his little yifu for anything.

In the past, and for ever after.

Whether if he was called Shen Shiliu, or Gu Yun.

Gu Yun felt that his eyelids were getting heavier and heavier. He leaned on the bed, closed his eyes then said, "Chang Geng, many things will change from now on. No one can know where their final destination will be right from the start, sometimes you must not think too much."

Chang Geng stared at Gu Yun without blinking. His eyes unknowingly carried hints of carefully hidden greed. He admitted with sorrow that Gu Yun was right; many things will change, living people will have to die, good times will dissipate, relatives and friends will be in the end separated, affections as deep as the sea and as high as the heaven will eventually resemble a stream of water flowing towards the ends of the earth...

Only his own final destination was already permanently established: he would become a madman.

Gu Yun moved further into the bed, then patted the empty space beside him: "Come here, we will have to quickly be on the move again tomorrow, sleep here at my place tonight."

After midnight, Chang Geng fell asleep in Gu Yun's marshal tent. As usual, the Bone of Impurity refused to let go of him, endless nightmares came one after another. But he could always sense a faint medicinal scent around him. He knew very well that he was safe,

even vaguely understanding that he was only dreaming, those fears and resentments seemed to be separated from him by a layer.

For Chang Geng, this was a rare night of peaceful sleep.

Of course, that was if he didn't wake up and found that he had used one arm of the Marquis of Order as a pillow all night causing it to go numb, and not only that, he was even snuggled deep into the man's chest.

Especially Gu Yun, that shameless bastard would never understand the sensitive and emotional heart of the still growing young boy. The more self-conscious the other became, the more he would pour oil into the fire. Marshal Gu believed that since they have already shared a bed for the night, Chang Geng had already reconciled with him, thus continuing his bad habits. He rubbed his numbed arm and teased the boy as his morning entertainment, it even appeared like he would remember this to always bring up again in the future.

Was this person's ill and weakened appearance from last night just an act again?!

In the early morning, Shen Yi saw that Chang Geng was angrily stomping out of Gu Yun's marshal tent, blushing red. For the rest of that day, he would turn another way as soon as he would see Gu Yun.

On the road, Shen Yi ushered his horse over, glanced at Gu Yun's face then asked, "Is everything alright now?"

Gu Yun, like an old wolf, proudly said without a care: "Just a little kid, such trivial matters. There was nothing in the first place."

Shen Yi had witnessed Gu Yun spin around with concern and anxiety from the previous two days, he was at a complete loss of words and could only sneer.

Gu Yun as per usual pretended he couldn't hear, watching the back of Chang Geng from far away, he suddenly spoke: "Say...can I leave the Black Iron Camp into his hands down the road?"

Shen Yi dryly replied:" You want him to meet a tragic demise?"

Gu Yun made an irritated sound as if Shen Yi had just killed his mood.

"Do you really think that the Black Iron Camp is a nice thing? I am speaking honestly, Zi Xi, pardon me for saying these words that are difficult to hear," Shen Yi said: "The Black Iron Camp in the hands of the Old Marquis, it was a *'weapon for the country'*. But when handed to you, it becomes a *'weapon against the country'*. The weapon *for* the country is radiant, favored by many, the same can't be said for a weapon *against* the country."

Hearing the meaning behind his words, Gu Yun's lazy smile disappeared.

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P.S. ICYMI, we have put an extra chapter at the beginning explaining the title Sha Po Lang :)

Chapter 16: Storm Clouds

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Gu Yun did not feel offended for even the slightest bit, he burst out laughing, his entire being giving off the arrogant and wild aura of 'raging wind and stormy rain could not affect me'.

—

If one wished to discuss these complex relationships, it should first be started from the former Emperor.

The former emperor spent his lifetime on horseback, had obtained grand achievements in both politics and military, a legend that was rarely seen throughout history. The man had brought Great Liang's might to its peak - like the sun at noon - no neighboring countries would dare to offend. Additionally, he was also the founder of both Ling Shu Institute and the Black Iron Camp.

It was a pity that this brilliant and wise Emperor was fated for a lonesome life. During his reign, he had four Empresses but none was able to live for long. He gave birth to three sons and two daughters in total, but four of which have witnessed their young ones die before them.

When the former emperor passed away, the only child left was the first princess who had married early.

Legend has it that when the princess was about sixteen or seventeen years old, she was infected with a severe illness that almost took her life. Fortunately, as she already had a marriage arrangement with Gu Yun's father, the monk of Hu Guo Temple lit a candle of longevity for the princess and advised that she should get married early. True to these words, after being wedded to the Marquis, the princess' illness had slowly improved.

From this point of view, it seemed that the previous princes and princess passing away one after another at a young age was due to the former emperor's fate counteracting theirs.

The emperor who had lost all his wives and children, at his final moment had decided to leave the Black Iron Camp and the utmost vital military power to his most beloved princess and her husband, but the country of Great Liang could not change their surname, the next emperor had to be adopted from a different branch.

The reason that the current Emperor - His Majesty Yuan He was able to be successfully enthroned that year - a large extent of it was thanks to the assistance of the First Princess.

Emperor Yuan He had harbored great affection for her. Until she passed away, he had always respectfully referred to her as an 'aunt' and took her only son, Gu Yun, into the palace to take care of. He personally granted him the name 'Zi Xi', he had repeatedly told the officers and magistrates that 'Zi Xi is like my younger brother', and ordered the Princes to refer to him as 'Royal Uncle' when meeting in private.

'Uncle' or 'Aunt' were merely false titles, not entirely important, what mattered was Great Liang's military forces, under the direct control of the Marquis of Order, stood behind the little boy Gu Yun in that year.

The old faction of the previous Marquis was still there. If anything were to happen to Gu Yun in the hands of Emperor Yuan He, whether or not if His Majesty could still sit peacefully on the throne, that was still up for discussion.

Taking advantage that Gu Yun was still young, Emperor Yuan He had spent these ten years weakening the old faction of the Marquis of Order - the Black Iron Camp almost ceased to exist under this underhanded tactic.

It's a pity that human's calculation cannot be compared to that of God's. The Western Region's border defenses fell into a tight position, and foreign enemies were invading. They have sent out three marshals in total, but if they were not old - then they were good-for-nothings. Great Liang - already accustomed to singing and dancing in peace - appeared to prefer the pen rather than the sword.

And hence, the imperial court could not find a single person who

could take up a weapon.

The Ling Shu Institute, which has been quiet for many years, suddenly brought forth their request to rebuild the Black Iron Camp.

The scrap metal that had been dulled by the emperor for ten years and that was on the verge of dying, in the end, still did not die out - at the hands of Gu Yun, it was brought back to life.

Gu Yun's feelings for His Majesty were very complicated.

On one hand, after the death of the Previous Marquis and the First Princess, it was His Majesty who has raised him. Emperor Yuan He had given him the warmth that he had never received from his own parents.

The princess was not the type of woman who hid away at home - but one that could take up arms. Just from being able to stay alive until she was able to get married - and not lose her life to her father's solitary star was enough to be seen as a true hero.

Gu Yun was born with two fathers; he did not know what the concept of a gentle and kind mother was like. This unreliable couple has brought him to the battlefield of the northern frontier even before he could properly learn how to walk, spending his childhood eating wind and sand to grow up. Little bits of pampering and gentleness, elegance and refinement, could be said to have all come from Emperor Yuan He.

On the other hand, Emperor Yuan He was quite a weak-minded person. When he was a young man, his weakness and hesitation could be reluctantly described as 'compassionate and benevolent'. After he grew older, this had completely turned into 'dimmed and incompetent'.

Every day, the old man would not consider how to strengthen the country and expand their territory but would only be concerned about his own right to the throne. If he wasn't using his authority to balance out his subjects, then he would smother Gu Yun, using new and different tricks to dishearten all military personnel.

On one side he was *thoroughly* protected, on the other, he was *thoroughly* hindered and held back. Gu Yun was stuck in the middle of these two types of '*thoroughness*', he would much rather go eat sand at the frontier instead.

Shen Yi said with deeper meaning: "Too much of one good thing can be a bad thing, Grand Marshal, people from ancient times had said - even grand achievements must not threaten the one above. You have already beaten up the enemies on all four sides - then should the next step is to rebel? Of course, we know you don't entertain such thoughts, but there is no telling what the Emperor might think."

Gu Yun said indifferently: "I was granted the title of 'Order', that is, fighting to maintain order for Great Liang; other matters are not under my control."

Shen Yi opened his mouth.

Gu Yun cut in: "I know what you want to advise, you don't have to say it."

The two have been partners for many years, just one look was enough to link their thoughts. This dialogue might sound confusing. Shen Yi was - of course, not trying to discuss the current Emperor with Gu Yun. The Emperor was sick and was also of old age, this time he had urgently summoned Gu Yun back to the capital; that was enough to see that he would soon have to go to heaven.

What he meant was, of course, the new Emperor of the future.

Not counting Chang Geng who got lost, the Emperor had two sons. The Crowned Prince Li Feng was a dependable and calm person, he had familiarized himself with books and scriptures since childhood. However, his philosophy was much like his father's and also favored literary to military, he did not approve of expanding the army and strengthening armed forces. He believed that this will affect Heaven's goodwill and the people's livelihood.

On the contrary, the Second Prince, *Wei Wang* was extremely ambitious, had once entered military ranks, and was eager to expand their territory.

And for the military officers like them, it was clear who was the better choice between the two.

Gu Yun's expression darkened.

Shen Yi knew the right thing for him to do now was to shut his mouth, yet at the same time he could not help but say: "Marshal, as long as you show even the slightest hint, even if it is only an acquiescence..."

Gu Yun looked at him - his gaze seemed to contained two Wind Slashers full with killing intent. Shen Yi's heart suddenly tightened, his voice died out in his throat.

Gu Yun strictly spoke every word with force: "After arriving at the capital, Black Iron Camp's three factions will be on standby outside the Nine Gates. Anyone who dares to take advantage of His Majesty's weakened condition for their own personal gains - will be executed on the spot no matter who it might be. Shen Ji Ping, do I make myself clear?"

Shen Yi face went pale for a second, after a long time, he whispered: " ..... Yes. "

They were both silents for a moment. Gu Yun's expression gradually eased out, he suddenly said: "This was not aimed at you "

Shen Yi reluctantly smiled.

"The thirteenth year of Yuan He... it was the most painful year I have lived, the First Princess and the Old Marquis were both away, you have also been taken back to Shen family. At that time I was almost blind, and my ears could not hear well anymore "

Gu Yun whispered, "There was a heavy snow outside that day, it was incredibly cold, I was holding onto the old Marquis's sword and was hiding behind the door, not willing to let anyone come close.

"It was the Emperor that took His Highness the Third Prince and quietly came to my house. Being a supreme ruler of a nation, yet he had stood in the snow for half an hour before he could coax me to

come out of my room. He wrote in my palm to communicate... and even told the guards to pile up two snowmen for us.

"The Third Prince... A Yan, he was one year younger than me, and was shy like a little girl, always smiling, he did not get angry no matter how much of a bastard I was..."

Gu Yun's voice came to a halt.

The Third Prince had died at the age of nine.

Shen Yi: "His Majesty was a compassionate man that is hard to find."

Unfortunately, love and compassion could not make a good Emperor.

Gu Yun did not continue, he looked up and watched Chang Geng riding on his horse from afar, Chang Geng tilted his head to say something to Ge Ban Xiao sitting in the cart. The boy's round and innocent head peeked out from inside, laughing and smiling as he responded.

Chang Geng could feel something behind his back, he looked back and caught Gu Yun's gaze on him. The boy's expression suddenly became uncomfortable and he turned back around with irritation.

Gu Yun said: "This kid's appearance was exactly like his barbarian mother. But his personality was more like His Majesty's. If A Yan was able to safely grow up, perhaps this is how he would be like."

Shen Yi closed his mouth, realizing that whatever he said would be useless.

Chang Geng could not hear what Gu Yun and Shen Yi were saying, but he always felt that his smiles seemed like they were looking down on him, Iike thorns pricking one's back. After a while, he couldn't help but sneak a peek at Gu Yun and found that he was

actually coming over.

Still not done?

Chang Geng didn't want to talk to him at all. He immediately ushered the horse and ran forward. Unexpectedly, he ran a bit too far and accidentally came near the prisoner cart escorting the Barbarian Prince.

The eyes of the Heavenly Wolf's Prince were like rust piercing from inside, resentment carved deep into bones and marrows. Chang Geng felt an uncomfortable sensation as soon as he caught his gaze, he took hold of the reins, intended on moving away from him.

No one expected that in that moment, the man-devouring gaze of the barbarian went past over Chang Geng, and focused on someone behind, he suddenly grinned: "Gu Yun, hundreds and millions of perished souls are looking at you."

His voice resembled a piece of rusted iron scraping against a porcelain plate, drenched in a demonic aura, causing one's hairs to stand upright altogether, Chang Geng's horse let out a disturbed neigh then took a few steps forward in panic.

"The lingering souls of our tribes are looking at you, the wreckage of iron armors under the burial grounds are looking at you, ha ha ha ha... The infinite power of Chang Sheng Tian will bestow upon you endless ill-omens, you will be split into pieces under the blade of our tribe, your soul will be ripped apart by thousands and thousands of demons after your death, you can never break free.."

The distorted face of the barbarian Prince and the blood-covered lips of Xiu Niang suddenly overlapped. Chang Geng felt like his entire body from head to toe was submerged into an ice cavern. He let out a groan and instantly went to reach for the sword hanging at his side; attempting to slay off the head of this barbarian.

But before the sword could be completely pulled out, a hand had already casually pushed it back.

Gu Yun had already walked his horse over by his side,

impatiently swept a glance over the Barbarian Prince who was talking as if he was possessed: "Why don't Your Highness save some of your 'infinite power' to bless your tribes with might to become a dominating nation, with ten thousand years of longevity?"

Gu Yun then pulled on the reins of Chang Geng's horse after he finished talking, tilted his head to look at the pale-faced boy on his side and smiled. "You really believe that? Hey now, these people are experts in scaring children, in this respect, they have at least led Great Liang by more than ten years - what is so interesting about prisoners? Go, go play over there."

Chang Geng: "But he dared to say such things to you..."

Gu Yun did not feel offended for even the slightest bit, he burst out laughing, his entire being giving off the arrogant and wild aura of 'raging wind and stormy rain could not affect me'.

Chang Geng's scowl did not ease out yet. He was somewhat irritated at first, but gradually, as the chilling air surrounding him seemed to melt away and vanished in Gu Yun's carefree laughter - those words suddenly became quite laughable now.

A small idea suddenly raised up inside Chang Geng for the first time. He seriously thought to himself:

"Why should I be afraid? Am I just going to turn insane simply because Bone of Impurity forces me to?"

On this long march, the fear and sorrow in Chang Geng's heart gradually calmed down in the midst of surrounding Iron Armors. He was like a small seedling, just a little bit more sunlight, and he can arise once again.

In the blink of an eye, they have already arrived at the Imperial Capital.

When the gate of the Palace opened on both sides, even Black Eagles flying high from above must kneel down on the ground to show respect.

Gu Yun grasped Chang Geng's back: "Don't think too much, let's

go meet your Royal Father."

Chang Geng was pushed by him, and when he really caught sight of an old man on the bed, he could hardly make the connection between this withered and ill figure with the term "Emperor" .

He was so old, his greyed hairs resemble a batch of dried up silver threads, his skin was shriveled, he appeared extremely frail and pallid, his thin lips quivered slightly, and he looked at Gu Yun with difficulty.

Gu Yun's footsteps momentarily paused - although it was undetectable. Chang Geng was sharp and could sense him took in a deep breath, but when he looked back, Gu Yun's face was once again already void of emotions.

"Your Majesty, your subject did not disgrace your mission," Gu Yun said, "I have brought His Highness the Fourth Prince back for you."

Emperor Yuan He's eyes slowly turned towards Chang Geng, Chang Geng's whole body froze, and momentarily wanted to back away, he could felt that the gaze of the old man on the bed contained a long hook that pierced through the flow of time - as if the man was not looking at him at all, but was looking at someone else through him.

However, as Gu Yun pushed him from behind, he could not help but move forward two steps.

Gu Yun whispered in his ear: "Kneel down."

Chang Geng knelt down as he was told, and saw two lines of tears flowing out of Emperor Yuan He's shriveled and muddy eyes, followed along with the wrinkles at the corners of his eyes and dripped down.

Chang Geng heard Gu Yun murmur: "Call him 'Royal Father'."

Chapter 17: Deceased

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"This cousin...will be watching you"

—

Chang Geng could not bear to say it. On the way over, countless people have sneaked glances at him, he felt as if he would drown under their gazes, but he still could not see any resemblance between himself and the man on the bed, not even a single hair.

He heard Gu Yun come closer to his ear and say softly: "Just say one word, whether it is genuine or false, just once."

Chang Geng turned his head and saw the eyes of his little yifu. His gaze was clear and cold, and there was not a hint of tears — not even pretense. He appeared both beautiful and ruthless at the same time.

This seemingly ruthless person sighed and whispered: "I'm begging you."

Even if there were more conflicts in Chang Geng's heart, more questions that he couldn't figure out, after hearing this sentence, he had no choice but to compromise. He thought: *"Perhaps just let this counterfeit good comfort him."*

He lowered his eyes and said with not much heart put into it: "Royal Father."

The eyes of Emperor Yuan He suddenly lit up, as if he was trying to gather all the life force he had left to create a streak of light, his gaze resembling fireworks that lit up the entire chamber. It almost seemed like no matter how long he looked at Chang Geng it would still not be enough, after a while, he quietly spoke:

"I gave... gave to you the name 'Min'*, hoping that my son shall grow to be bright and fair, worry-free and at peace...hoping that you shall be safe and sound for an entire lifetime...for hundreds of years...

Do you have a childhood name?"

旻[mín]: meaning the heaven, the sky*

"Yes, I am called Chang Geng."

Emperor Yuan He's lips twitched slightly, there were sounds coming from his throat but he momentarily could not say a word.

Gu Yun had to step forward and helped the old Emperor up, gently patting his back and letting him spit out. He shakily gasped for air, panting heavily as he laid back down, his bony and frail hand grabbed Gu Yun's wrist.

Gu Yun: "Your subject is here."

Emperor Yuan He's voice sounded similar to a broken pipe: "His brothers had all grown up, only my Chang Geng,... I could not watch him become an adult ..."

Gu Yun seemed to have sensed something. Making eye contact with the emperor, one old one young — one with still wet tears, one with complete calmness, they only exchanged a line of sight, yet it seemed as if a hidden agreement had been made between them.

Gu Yun: "Your subject understood."

"I am entrusting this child to you, Zi Xi, I have no one else, I can only trust you, you must take care of him for me...," Emperor Yuan He's voice grew thinner and thinner, his words became quite incomprehensible near the end. Gu Yun somewhat understood what he meant with difficulty.

"I want to give to him his royal status... Where did you find him?"

Gu Yun: "Yanhui town of the Northern Frontier."

"Yanhui...," Emperor Yuan He repeated this name to himself:

"I have never been to that area, how far away would that be... then... pass...pass on my decree...the fourth son of the Emperor, Li

Min, will be titled *Yan Bei * Wang*, but... but not now, we must wait until after his coming of age ceremony..."

**Yan (bird) from 'Yanhui town' (bird returning) and bei from 'Northern', Yan Bei means Northern Bird.*

Gu Yun listened quietly, normally for royal statuses of Great Liang, a title of one character was called *Qin Wang**. For example, the Second Prince was granted the title of *"Wei Wang"*. A title made up of two characters was called *Jun Wang* — they were slightly lower in status compared to the former, usually separated from the members of the royal family by a grade.

**another way to say 'Prince'.*

Emperor Yuan He: "I do not wish to wrong him, but I could no longer defend him, I must prevent his older brothers to feel dissatisfaction in the future ..... Zi Xi, do you understand why we must wait until he comes of age to inherit his title?"

Gu Yun nodded after a pause.

Chang Geng did not know what kind of riddles they were playing at, his heart involuntarily beat like mad, as if he could sense something incoming.

Emperor Yuan He: "Because I want to make a decree, let my Chang Geng be your adopted son. This was not the custom, but I have no one else I can count on, I must break the practice of former generations and let him rely on you for a few years with no title and no status...

"Zi Xi, you must be kind to him, even if you have your own children in the future, don't mistreat him, he is already in his teens, he won't trouble you for much longer... When the time comes for him to be crowned, he will depart to his own manor as a Prince ... I have already selected the proper location for it as well..."

When getting to this part Emperor Yuan He was suddenly struck with a violent coughing fit, Gu Yun wanted to reach out and help him but the man waved him off.

The old emperor looked at the inexplicably pale complexion of Chang Geng, and the more he looked, the more heartbroken he became.

He thought, why can't such a good child like this stay by his side?

After all the trouble and difficulty of finding him, why could he not look at him for long?

Emperor Yuan He retracted his eyes away from Chang Geng, like a weak and cowardly child, he said to Gu Yun instead: "He must be weather-beaten and weary from a long travel already, let the boy go get some rest, I wanted to have a few words with you."

Gu Yun sent Chang Geng out to the door and handed him over to a guard. He whispered in his ear: "Go rest first, wait for me to come find you later."

Chang Geng did not say anything and silently followed the guard's lead. He could not describe what he was feeling inside.

This time he had officially and formally become Gu Yun's adopted son. It should be a good thing, yet he could not make himself to feel any joy.

However, the prestigious words of the ruler have been bestowed, there was no room for him to refuse. He was not allowed to resist, and he was not allowed to say even a word in this matter.

He could only bow his head and walk with small strides away from the palace full of medicinal and deathly aura. But after merely a few steps, Chang Geng involuntarily looked back at Gu Yun and saw that the man was turning sideways towards the inside. The young Marquis of Order had a side profile that was as beautiful as a painting.

The heavy formal attire wrapped around him, gave off a sense of restraint that could not be said in a few words, causing a bitter feeling to rise up inside one's chest.

What were you thinking? Chang Geng smiled mockingly and

thought to himself: *A few days ago you were only a son of a small town's mayor, with a mother who abused you and gave you poison. Today you're the adopted son of the Marquis of Order, you can't even dream up such an amazing thing as this.*

He just laughed at himself, powerless with everything that happened around him. The thirteen-year-old boy walked through the dimly lit palace corridor, a total of nine hundred and eighty-one steps — a walk for him to remember for a lifetime.

The gate was tightly closed once again, the incense burner with steam at the bedside letting out white smoke.

Emperor Yuan He spoke to Gu Yun who was kneeling next to him: "I remember in your childhood you were very close with A Yan, you both were close in age, standing together, the two of you resembled a pair of jade dolls."

At the mention of the third prince, Gu Yun's expression finally changed: "Your subject was very stubborn, not at all comparable to the Third Prince, who was already refined and had understanding manners at a young age."

"You were not stubborn," Emperor Yuan He paused, then repeated in a low voice. "Not stubborn... If A Yan resembled you for even the slightest bit, he would not have died so young. Dragons birthed dragons, phoenix birthed phoenix, what kind of seed will grow into that kind of tree, Zi Xi, the blood flowing in you is the true iron bloodline of the Former Emperor... "

Gu Yun: "Your subject is afraid."

Emperor Yuan He waved his hand: "There are no outsiders today, I want to say a few honest words to you. Zi Xi, you were naturally born to expand territories. Even wolves will tremble and bow down before you, but I always worry that you are too strongly shrouded in a violent and murderous aura, this will have a detrimental effect to your future blessing."

There was a rumor coming from the common folk that Gu Yun's

grandfather on his mother's side — Emperor Wu — had done too much killing in his lifetime, causing him to fall into a bleak fate, losing all his children one by one.

"*Wei Wang*'s ambitions might be grand, but with you keeping guard, the country that belongs to the Crowned Prince in the future was of not much concern, I'm only concerned about you... You must listen to my words, all good matters in this world could turn bad once it is too much, you must cherish and build your blessings for times to come ... The old head monk of Hu Guo temple could be considered to have watched over you since you were young, the teachings of Buddha are boundless. If you have some downtime, you should go visit his place for a while ."

The old bald donkey of Hu Guo Temple had a crow's beak: he once said that Gu Yun bore the star of calamity, bearing ill affinity with family relatives — parents, siblings, spouse, and children. Because of this, Gu Yun had always refused to step into that temple.

At this time as he heard the Emperor mention this matter, Gu Yun reminded himself: *"Yes that's right, almost forgot about that bald old man, I must wait for the opportunity to arise and settle all loans with him at once, set fire to his phony and rotten temple that scams people."*

The reason for his deep resentment was not due to him being small-hearted. That year after the death of the Old Marquis, the emperor had also used this argument of 'heavy killing intent will bring in bad omens' to weaken the Black Iron Camp.

However, in recent years, there were sightings of 'dragons*' belonging to foreign countries frequently traveling to Great Liang's sea. From the Northern Frontier to the Western Region, and even the Eastern Sea from thousands of miles away — not a single territory of Great Liang could be free from the greedy eyes of foreign enemies, like hungry tigers overlooking their prey.

**dragons in this story is a type of ship travel on the sea.*

Too much killing can bring ill omens - so did it mean that a fallen country, every place everywhere engulfed in the flame and smokes of wars, the people straying, bodies of the dead floating for miles —

could be seen as peace and prosperity?

If Marshal Gu and the Black Iron Camp was as sentimental as his distant cousin here, then for the innocent civilians of this grand nation, who must they rely on to defend their territories?

Are we going to use the imperial court's scholars to 'conquer people with morality'?

Truth to be told, not only did Gu Yun want to battle, he also wanted to give them a battle to remember once and for all. It was best to completely wipe out the Western Region, marching through the doorsteps of the Western foreigners who spent their days craving for the territories of Central Plains, let them be frightened and never dare to look at other people's beautiful nation again.

When the Western rebellion situation had settled, Gu Yun once brought forth his request for exactly this. But perhaps the Emperor thought that he had already turned insane, he thoroughly dismissed this request, but not only did he refuse, he also used the strange task of 'searching for the Fourth Prince' to send him off to the Northern Frontier.

Of course, the emperor had not foreseen; he held Gu Yun restricted at the Northern Frontier, Gu Yun captured a Barbarian Prince back for him.

For some people, the star of carnage shone directly on their head, and if they were not loyal generals who helped expand the territory, they were bound to return to bring disasters on their own country and people.

The sentimental emperor and the coldhearted young general — one sitting, one lying — on the narrow bedside, dug deep into his heart one last time, but in the end, neither of them could convince the other.

Emperor Yuan He looked at his ice-cold eyes and suddenly felt immense sorrow.

The old Emperor thought, if he wasn't greedy for imperial

powers, then wouldn't he just be a leisurely prince who walked the dog?

Then he wouldn't have met the woman whose fate was already decided. Perhaps he would have given his lifetime of affection for someone else, and he wouldn't have to spend years and years of his life separated from his wife and child.

This kind of throne full of thorns and dried bones, perhaps only the people who were determined to kill and resolute like the Marquis of Order was qualified to sit on?

Emperor Yuan He whispered: "Zi Xi...Zi Xi ah..."

Gu Yun's expression that was cast in iron suddenly wavered, his eyelids slightly drooping down, the straight shoulders became slightly softer, no longer so inhumanly stiff.

Emperor Yuan He asked: "Do you despise me?"

Gu Yun: "Your subject does not dare to."

Emperor Yuan He asked again: "Then will you remember me in the future?"

Gu Yun closed his mouth.

The old Emperor stared at him, he did not let go and continued to press on: "Why are you not speaking?"

Gu Yun was silent for a while, one could not make out a hint of sorrow on his face:

"If Your Majesty also goes, Zi Xi will no longer have any family member left."

Emperor Yuan He's chest seemed to be tightened up by an invisible hand for a moment. He had never heard this little bastard say such warm-hearted words before in his life. Just this one sentence had almost erased all the resentment and affection between the two generations that have never been spoken out loud before, leaving in the continuous flow of time a faint and solitary regret of having to

part with each other.

At this moment, a servant at the door carefully reminded: "Your Majesty, it is time for the medicine."

Gu Yun quickly recovered. As he looked up again, he had already reverted back to a disdained and unparalleled lethal weapon hidden in human form: "Your Majesty, please take care of yourself, I will take my leave now."

Emperor Yuan He suddenly opened his mouth again and called his nickname: "Xiao Shiliu!"

Gu Yun stopped in his tracks.

Emperor Yuan He struggled to reach under the pillow and found a string of old wooden bead bracelet: "Come here, give me your hand."

Gu Yun looked at the panting old man putting the Buddhist bracelet of no value around his wrist, complicated emotions rising up inside.

"This cousin....will be watching you," Emperor Yuan He quietly said while patting the back of his hand.

Gu Yun's heart was hurting too much to bear it and could no longer maintain his calm composure, he could only quickly request to be excused.

Three days later, the Emperor passed away.

Magistrates and military officers and thousands of civilians once again bid farewell to an era.

Chapter 18: Marquis's Manor

T/N: thanks to teacher Shen we will be getting some fluff next chapter.

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"Marshal, inexperienced young child or severely ill elder, they all teach you how to better yourself, having the chance to meet them are already good fortune."

—

After the capital was bathed in a heavy rain, the hidden chill of the ground started to rise up, revealing the depression that was condensed into frost.

Chang Geng mindlessly followed a collection of strangers to send off the old Emperor. On the day of the funeral, there were eight carriages pulling the Nine Dragons coffin, there were steam-powered horn speakers on both sides of the avenue, spontaneously playing the burial tunes while spurting out white steam that covered the entire imperial capital. Heavy Armors were used as a barrier to prevent the onlookers from entering.

Outside of this boundary were an infinite amount of people watching the ritual, including the Great Liang people, the Yi people, the Baiyue people, the Barbarians... and even the countless Western foreigners.

Countless peeping gaze fell on Chang Geng, calculating and speculating — the Emperor's fourth son, Li Min, whose identity was hidden in a riddle. But unfortunately, no one dared to come forth to start a conversation with him under the watching eyes of the Marquis of Order. Chang Geng was concealed by Marshal Gu in a blatant manner. In the past few days, except for the Crowned Prince and *Wei Wang* who hovered about him two times each, he had never been in contact with a single outsider.

When all this dust settled, Chang Geng was taken to the Marquis

of Order's Manor.

From the outside, the manor was truly mighty and imposing: two enormous gates opened up, two beast heads with green face baring their golden fangs were hanging in front, letting out white steam from its mouth and nose, the thirty-six clockwork gears rotating at the same time, the heavy bolts creaking as they were lifted up, revealing two large iron puppets* on each side.

**Iron puppets in this book were run by Ziliujin and other mechanisms, they can automatically move, you can picture them like a suit of armor that can move.*

There were two sets of Black Armor for military personnel hanging on the side. The steam-powered lamp was dimly lit, the house guards stood on the side, a cold murderous aura could instantly be felt.

Of course, as one walked further in, they would soon realize that the Manor's might only stayed at the main gate.

Although the courtyard of the manor was wide, vegetation and trees were very far and little in between. Under its intimidating facade, the inside only had a few servants that were already of old age. They did not say anything aside from stopping to pay respect to Gu Yun as they saw him.

Majority of the machines and iron puppets used by the common folk ran on coals. Only a very small fraction of them used *Ziliujin*, which usually consisted of large contraptions such as the dam and the giant puppets used for reclamation. These were owned by the local government; as for the precious gadgets, only certain grade-level officers were qualified to use.

Of course, regulations are regulations, whether people would comply with them or not was another story. For example, Governor Guo of the small town of Yanhui absolutely did not qualify, yet the number of *Ziliujin*-powered objects he possessed were more than just one.

But the Marquis of Order — whose grade was definitely more

than enough, yet his manor appeared unexpectedly poor and plain, except for a few iron puppets, almost no other *Ziliujin*-powered objects could be seen.

Perhaps the most valuable thing in the entire manor was the few calligraphy written by the most renowned scholar of the time — teacher Lin Mo Sen himself. It was said that Mo Sen was the teacher of the Marquis of Order, and one could be certain that these pieces were also given to him for free.

Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi also moved together with Chang Geng. Three children from the countryside who had never seen the world, tilted their head looking back and forth. Ge Ban Xiao innocently called: "Uncle Shiliu..."

Cao Niangzi quietly scolded: "That is the Marquis!"

"Hehe, Marquis sir" Ge Ban Xiao smiled and asked: "Your house does not seem as good-looking as Master Guo's."

Gu Yun did not mind: "How could I compare with Master Guo? Those people are far from the capital, they are oozing with wealth, unlike me, in order to save some money, I have to go to the palace to eat for free on the holidays."

This might sound like a joke, but Chang Geng could vaguely sense something in his words as he listened.

Still not waiting for him to ponder more about it, Cao Niangzi lowered his voice said to Ge Ban Xiao: "Didn't all the stage plays always show prestigious family's houses with a swing inside of a flower garden and many beautiful ladies?"

Ge Ban Xiao spoke seemingly with extensive knowledge: "The flower gardens are all in the back. And the women of the pristine families can't just show their faces casually for you to look, whether if it was the master or the servant. Don't ask such silly questions."

Gu Yun smiled and said: "My household doesn't have women, only the elderly housekeepers and helpers. Truth to be told, the most beautiful thing in this whole manor should be me, if you want to look

then feel free to."

He even blinked a few times after he finished, showing his all-white teeth with a bright smile.

Cao Niangzi quickly and shyly looked away. Ge Ban Xiao was also stunned - for he did not expect the Grand Marquis of Order himself to be as shameless as *"Shen Shiliu"*.

Gu Yun placed both hands behind his back, his fingers playing with the old beads bracelet left by the Emperor, he casually passed through the forlorn courtyard: "My mother had passed away long ago, and I am not married yet either, a bachelor who was neither young or old like myself, what do I require a lot of beautiful ladies for? It seems quite improper."

It sounded as if he was a proper person.

Cao Niangzi didn't dare to look directly at Gu Yun — he never dared to when it comes to good-looking men. He asked shyly: "Marquis sir, they always said that 'once inside the mansion, into the deep forever ...'"

Gu Yun was unable to restrain a laugh, he teased: "Why, you have to part with your young Xiao to be wedded to me?*"

**Both Cao Niangzi and Gu Yun are referencing the poem 'To The Maiden Wo Has Been Sold" by Cui Zhao from the Tang Dynasty. The original lines could be translated as "Once inside the mansion, into the deep forever/ her young Xiao, now only a stranger"*

Cao Niangzi's small face blushed as red as a monkey's bottom.

Chang Geng's expression immediately darkened: "Yifu!"

Only now did Gu Yun remember his status of an elder. He quickly recovered his dignified image with difficulty, "There are not many rules here. Whatever you want to eat, you can instruct the kitchen. There is also a library and an arsenal in the backyard, as well as horses, reading or practicing martial arts or horse riding are all up to you.

"Usually Shen Yi will come over in his free time, if he is busy, I will request another teacher for you — there is no need to notify me when you go out to play, as long as you went with a guard, and don't let get into troubles outside... Hm, let me think about, what else..."

After pondering for a moment, Gu Yun turned back and said: "Ah yes, there are some servants that are already of old age, their reaction is inevitably slow, please pardon them for this and don't get angry at them."

He was simply giving them a general instruction, yet Chang Geng's heart was inexplicably swept away by the rare warmth in his words — although the warmth was not meant for him.

Gu Yu patted Chang Geng's back: "It is quite lonesome here, but do think of it as your own home from now on."

For a very long time afterward, Chang Geng never had the chance to see Gu Yun.

The new Emperor had to ascend, *Wei Wang* had to be intimidated, the captured Barbarian Prince had to be dealt with, and the situation of the barbarians invading without any reason had to be made clear of. There were countless socializing to do, countless probing, so on and so forth.

Chang Geng thought of himself as diligent, but every morning before he woke up, Gu Yun had already left. And when he jolted awake in the middle of the night, Gu Yun still had not returned.

In the blink of an eye, the season of stuffy heat had passed. After autumn hurriedly went by, we arrived at the season for heating stoves.

In the middle of the night, the stone road was covered with a thin layer of ice. The air was engulfed in white fog, the hooves of horses sounded from the end of the path. After a while, two black horses pierced through the mist and stopped at the back door of the Marquis' manor.

The carriage made a sound, the three heating pipes around the cart's body releasing white steam. The door opened from the inside. Shen Yi stepped out first.

Shen Yi breathed out white smoke and said to the person inside the cart: "I think that you shouldn't get off here, let people open the gate and drive directly in. It's too cold out."

The person inside — Gu Yun — made a sound in agreement, his face seemed very tired, but his spirit seemed to be alright. He instructed the driver: "Go open up the gate."

The driver followed his order and ran out. Shen Yi stood still and asked: "Did the headache subside?"

Gu Yun lazily dragged out his response: "It did, killing a few more Jia Lais won't be a problem."

Shen Yi: "What did His Majesty summon you into the palace for? I heard that the Heavenly Wolf sect sent their ambassador?"

"The crippled old man dared to send his request, almost smeared his own snot on it. He said that they will increase the annual amount of Ziliujin tribute by ten percent, pleaded the emperor to pardon his son that is still 'young and bashful', still 'ignorant' and begged to release him, the old man is willing to take his son's place and come over to be Great Liang's prisoner in his stead."

Gu Yun's mood is not good, the words coming from his mouth weren't pleasant to hear either: "Old bastard, birthed seven or eight children already, can this still be counted as being 'young and ignorant'? Is it that the dried dirt and stone outside of the border are no good thus the seedlings are also growing slowly?"

Shen Yi frowned: "You did not explode right in the middle of the court session, did you?"

"Since when do I have such bad temper? But if I just stood still, then the Magistrate of Revenue who is turning mad from poverty would agree on the spot already." Gu Yu said coldly, then soften his voice and sighed: "The imperial court filled with countless

intellectuals - yet no one knew what 'releasing the tiger back to its mountain' means."

The Heavy Armor units that were used in attacking Yanhui town all have explosives equipped on the front of their chest. That was the typical design of the *Westerners'*.

**In this story, Westerners are referring to the Europeans.*

The bones of the Central Plains people were naturally thinner, even the soldiers in the army were generally not so sturdy. Their design of the Heavy Armor also prioritized lightness and agility, and usually, did not play 'breaking boulders with one's chest' on the battlefield.

There was absolutely no doubt that the force standing behind assisting Jia Lai Yinghuo was the foreign Westerners who have always craved Great Liang's territories.

Gu Yun lowered his eyes and looked at the thin sheen of snow that was slightly reflective on the ground and whispered: "Surrounding the home country are nothing but tigers and wolves."

He longed for the day that he could board a Dragon and charge forward the Western sea, all the way to the foreign countries. However, after years and years of battles, Great Liang's Treasury was quickly emptied by him. At the moment, because Gu Yun supported the new Emperor, it had quickly stunned the rising of *Wei Wang*'s force just in time when the former emperor was in critical condition.This could be said to be an achievement, thus no matter what the subject might be, the newly enthroned Emperor would still show him respect for his opinion.

But could this respect last for long?

Shen Yi shook his head: "Let's not discuss this matter anymore, how is His Fourth Highness?"

"His Highness?" Gu Yun was surprised for a moment: "Very good, ah."

Shen Yi asked: "What does he do every day?"

Gu Yun consider for a moment, then replied with uncertainty: "...perhaps playing? But I heard Uncle Wang say that he doesn't seem to go outside much."

Shen Yi understood right away that Marshal Gu was raising His Highness similar to raising sheep; feeding with grass every day — other matters were of no concern. But this was no stranger to him because the old Marquis and the First princess also raised Gu Yun with this similar method.

Shen Yi sighed: "How did the former Emperor treat you, did you already forget?"

Gu Yun's face flashed with a hint of embarrassment — he didn't really understand how to get along with Chang Geng.

Chang Geng had passed the age of acting spoiled with adults, he also had a mature personality. Back in Yanhui town, it was this child who took care of his no-good yifu a lot more than the other way around.

Gu Yun couldn't afford to play with a bunch of children all day, but it's also difficult for him to act as an elder and to guide Chang Geng.

Because this was the burden that someone just handed to him, he still wasn't at the age to be a father and wasn't qualified to act the part.

Shen Yi asked again: "What are you planning for His Highness?"

Although Gu Yun once said that he would like to leave the Black Iron Camp for Chang Geng in the future; truth to be told, it was only a joke. He knew in his own heart that it was impossible.

In addition, to obtain grand achievements in military ranks, how much hardships and struggles one had to go through, no one was clearer about this matter than Gu Yun. As long as he was still alive for a day — still had the strength to carry their homeland, Great Liang, he did not wish for Chang Geng to experience the same bitterness he did.

At the same time, however, he also hoped that the little prince who got handed to him would have a bright future, or at the very least would have the ability to protect himself.

So how could a person not suffer and have a good future at the same time?

Parents from all over the world were struggling to find the answer to this question, no need for an amateur father such as Gu Yun to beat himself over with it. He had no other choice but to leave Chang Geng to mature on his own.

The driver had opened the door, lit up the lights, and was now standing on the side waiting for Gu Yun's command.

Shen Yi said to Gu Yun: "I understand that it is too demanding to wish for you to thoroughly watch over him, but he has met with very drastic changes, you are the only relative he has left, you should be more sincere and genuine with him. Even if you don't know what to do for him, just hanging around and write him a few calligraphy notes are good enough."

Perhaps these words finally reached Gu Yun, he patiently replied: "Yeah."

Shen Yi took a horse off the carriage and pulled up the reins.

He was on his horse about to leave, but after a few steps, he could not help but turn back and nag: "Marshal, inexperienced young child or severely ill elder, they all teach you how to better yourself, having the chance to meet them are already good fortune."

Gu Yun rubbed his forehead in pain: "My god, this undesirable broken-mouth bastard, I'm begging you, just go already!"

Shen Yi jokingly scolded him, then charged his horse forward.

Chapter 19: Secrets

T/N: FLUFF.

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He buried his face in the blanket and screamed. He was utterly disgusted by himself, too ashamed to see anyone ever again. He wished nothing more than to simply hit his head against the bedpost and end his life now.

—

After midnight, Gu Yun was utterly exhausted. He initially wanted to go back to rest, but in the end, affected by Shen Yi's words, his footsteps unconsciously turned forward to the back quarters.

At this time, there were not many lights that were still lit up in the capital. Chang Geng had long fallen asleep, Gu Yun did not disturb the old servants outside. He walked into the chamber lightly, the reflective light of the snow outside the window serving as his guide as he reached out and pulled the quilt up for Chang Geng. But suddenly, he found that the child did not seem to be sleeping well, as if he was being terrorized by nightmares.

"Not used to living in the manor?" Gu Yun thought, his ice-cold finger held onto Chang Geng's wrist.

Chang Geng was startled, he took in a deep breath then jolted awake, his gaze still stunned with fear and doubt, staring at the person at his bedside in a daze.

Gu Yun gently shook his wrist and softened his voice to ask: "Did you have a nightmare? What did you dream of?"

Chang Geng did not say a word for a while, his scattered gaze gradually found their focus once again. He stared at Gu Yun's eyes that resembled two burning flames in the midst of the dark night, and suddenly embraced his waist.

Gu Yun was still wearing shoulder guards made of black iron, bringing inside the room with it the cold air of the early winter. The cold iron was tightly attached to Chang Geng's forehead. Suddenly, in the haze of fright, Chang Geng seemed to have returned to the snowy night outside the city gate that year, with coldness piercing into one's bones. He shivered intently, only now did he gradually break free from the grasp of nightmares, he thought to himself: *I am still alive.*

The gears of the house clock rustled as they turned, and the brazier ran by coals have also been heated up. It was like a cauldron, placed in the middle of the room, the thin white smoke emerging from below, and was immediately swept away by the pipes. Only the warm heat circulated comfortably around the room.

Getting hugged by Chang Geng so suddenly, Gu Yun was dumbfounded for a while, a strange feeling filled his heart - for the first time, someone leaned on him with all their strength, almost giving off the sense of mutually depending on each other.

His frivolous appearance of *"I am invincible in this world"* displayed on a daily basis was of course just a fraud. He was very well aware of his own strengths and limits. If the Marquis of Order was not so self-aware, then after venturing a few trips out the battlefields, the grass on his grave would have probably grown as high as a person already.

However, at this moment, Gu Yun's heart suddenly created the illusion of *"there is nothing in this world that I cannot do"*.

Chang Geng's bone structure has grown, but still bore the fineness of a young child. Just by reaching out and tightening the embrace, one could touch the bones under his ribs through the thin clothing.

This thin flesh was pressed heavily on him, Gu Yun thought, he must take care of this child, for him to grow up as the Emperor's wish, protecting and watching over him, for him to live safe and sound until he's of hundred years old.

He can finally make up for the incompetence and hopelessness he felt towards A Yan's situation that year.

Gu Yun took off the iron guards on his shoulders, hung it on one side, and got on the bed of Chang Geng still in his full attire, he asked: "Are you missing your mother? - Ah, I meant your aunt."

Chang Geng shook his head.

Chang Geng did not have any deep affection for the Emperor, it seems that he only called the old Emperor as a father out of respect for Gu Yun. He asked again: "Do you miss Brother Xu?"

This time, Chang Geng did not deny it.

In all these years, Xu Baihu was the first kind person he had ever met. Although he was not an exceptionally gifted man, he was generous and gentle. His stepfather had used himself to set an example; for the first time, had made Chang Geng understand that one can go through life with such peacefulness.

It's just that Xu Baihu always had his hands full with military affairs and almost never came home, which created an opportunity for Gu Yun to come in to fill this empty gap in Chang Geng's heart.

Seeing the boy had silently confirmed this, Gu Yun tilted his head and hazily stared at the bed curtain at the top, suddenly not able to stop this unpleasant sensation inside. He involuntary asked: "Brother Xu treated you better than I did?"

Chang Geng gave him a surprised look, not understanding why Gu Yun would ask such a question with an already obvious answer.

This time, Gu Yun had miraculously understood his eyes, suddenly feeling as if an ice cold wind had swept through his heart. He said dryly: "Well there is no other choice, the emperor's order is hard to violate, you can only make do."

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun burst out laughing, Chang Geng could feel the slight vibration of his chest as he did so and suddenly was struck with a foreign sensation. The left half of his heart felt that the distance between them right now was somewhat unnatural, and wanted to move slightly further away from him.

But the right half was wishing that he could be turned into a thin piece of paper, and be glued close to him without even the slightest gap.

These two ideas battling indefinitely inside seemed to tear him in half.

And just when this decisive battle was ongoing, Gu Yun's bad habit is starting to kick in again.

Chang Geng's hair was scattered behind him and unfortunately fell into Gu Yun's hand. He began to unconsciously play with them, pulling back and forth. He did not use strength but gently tugged on his scalp.

Chang Geng was immediately startled, goosebumps spread out all over. The blood in his entire body shifted from flowing naturally to rushing like mad, as if he could hear the rustling as they ran through his blood vessels. An unknown source of heat broke into all his limbs and almost burned him from inside out.

Chang Geng quickly got up and took back his hair. He instinctively said with embarrassment: "Don't mess around!"

Gu Yun was often sick when he was younger and was also late in hitting his growth spurt, even at twelve or thirteen years old, he still bore the appearance of a child, hence why he also did not regard Chang Geng as an adult and was the least bit aware of the inappropriate nature of this situation.

He half-heartedly retracted his claws, placing both hands behind his head and said to Chang Geng: "I am not married yet, and of course, I do not have children, I don't even have any brothers and sisters, it is unavoidable that I wasn't able to thoroughly take care of you.

"There are many things, that if you don't tell me, it would be quite difficult for me to figure out, so if you harbor any grievances or irritations, don't hide it in your heart, all right?"

The tone of his voice was deep and pleasant to listen to,

probably due to his exhaustion, with it a little imperceptible ambiguity. It drove straight into Chang Geng's ear, making the boy's hairs all rise up, a thin layer of sweat coating his back.

Chang Geng nervously thought to himself: *"He was only making some casual conversations, why must I feel as if I'm venturing out the battlefield?"*

"Your Highness must also pardon me," Gu Yun said with a smile, patting the space next to him: "Come, lay down, tell me more about your dream just now."

At the mention of the dream, Chang Geng's nameless wildfire has managed to calm down. He stared at Gu Yun for a while, forcing himself to hold back the desires to reveal everything about Bone of Impurity, he first tested the waters:

"Shiliu, in this world, is there an existing type of poison that can cause one to turn insane?"

Gu Yun raised his eyebrows in dissatisfaction: "Who did you call Shiliu?"

He only reprimanded on the outside but actually did not pay it much mind. He proceeded to speak after a pause: "There must be, this world is big, especially in areas of foreign countries, there grow many herbs and plants that do not exist in Central Plains, not to mention all of their divine beings and gods that have been passed down from generation to generation. There are many secrets and trickery of theirs that we cannot explain."

Chang Geng's heart sank, his fingers gripping the ruined blade on his chest.

Gu Yun felt this was rather odd, he questioned again in reply: "Why are you asking about this subject?"

Chang Geng's fingertips were cold, the conflict in his head had abruptly come to an end, his voice layered in sadness: "It's nothing. I dreamed that one day, I became a madman, and ended up killing a lot of people."

After that, without waiting for Gu Yun to respond, Chang Geng had cut in first: "Dreams are all opposite from reality, I know."

He finally made up his mind to seal tightly the secret of the Bone of Impurity, with his youthful determination and will, Chang Geng refused to admit the possibility of losing. He must fight against and resist the Bone of Impurity to stay sane until the day he died.

However, even with such great courage in his chest, he still did not dare to inquire about what Gu Yun would think if he knew what would happen.

Chang Geng thought, even if he was infected with grotesque ulcers all over, his little yifu would still not abandon him. But if he knew that Chang Geng would eventually become a hysterical madman?

He instinctively avoided talking about it, he did not want to dwell on it deeper and asked instead: "Do you also have nightmares before?"

Gu Yun blurted out a lie: "How is that possible?"

But after the words came out of him, Gu Yun quickly remembered Shen Yi's words telling him to treat Chang Geng genuinely and sincerely, he then felt that his fib was a bit too far, he covered it up with a cough then saidy again: "No... Ah well, from time to time, when the sleeping position was not right, it could cause a few troublesome dreams sometimes."

Chang Geng: "What will you dream of?"

Gu Yun wasn't fond of talking about his feelings, because this whole process was immensely embarrassing, like running on the street in front of people while stripped naked, he carelessly answered just for the sake of it: "Just an incomprehensible mess, I would forget about all of it as soon as I woke up- Hurry and go to sleep, the sky will be bright soon."

Chang Geng didn't make a sound.

However, after a while, as Gu Yun sneaked a glance at him, he

saw that Chang Geng's eyes were wide open, staring at him. He finally could not help but feel his head ache.

"All right," Gu Yu sighed and tried to rummage through his memories, then spoke in the tone of coaxing children to sleep:

"When I was a child, I once dreamed that I got locked inside a place where I could not see my fingers. The only thing I know was that there are a lot of beasts surrounding me, so I kept running. It may be that because my legs were not stretched out. People said that if your legs are not stretched out properly, you won't be able to run quickly inside your dreams. I ran to the end, but it felt as if my legs and feet were made out of cotton, the more I tried to rush forward, the more I cannot move."

Chang Geng asked: "Then what happened next?"

Then of course, I was scared awake in fright, what else can there be?

However, Gu Yun's mouth refused to admit that he was woken up out of fear, he made up a bluff sounding as lively as real: "In the end, I ran out of patience. I didn't know how I was able to pull out an enormous blade engraved with golden strings, in one slash finishing all the beasts chasing me, and I woke up with satisfaction."

Chang Geng: "..."

He really wanted to hear a few serious words from the mouth of this Gu, but it seemed that this was too much to ask for.

No one expected that Gu Yun would pose a serious question afterward: "Do you know what to do if you have nightmares?"

Chang Geng hesitated, once again easily believing him, he shook his head curiously, waiting expectantly for Gu Yun's answer.

Gu Yun went on: "The reason why you have a nightmare is because there are little demons strolling in the house to play tricks on you. These little demons are all afraid of filth, so from now on whenever you have nightmares, remember to put the pot at the entry of your chamber, I guarantee it will scare those things running."

Chang Geng: "..."

Chang Geng was particularly quick to believe other people's made up fibs seriously, Gu Yun immediately found the enjoyment in teasing and messing with the boy, laughing energetically in the middle of the night.

Chang Geng once naively believed that his little yifu was visiting him out of concern. He now knew that this man was purely coming over to make fun of him for his own entertainment!

He turned over angrily with his back facing Gu Yun, two large words "*Get out*" was written clearly on it.

Gu Yun did not get out right away; he stayed until Chang Geng's breathing gradually became steady again, gently pulling up the blanket for him, then got up to leave.

Before leaving, Gu Yun went to grab the shoulder guards he took off just now. But just as he reached out, he remembered there were sayings that the reason children got disturbed in the middle of the night was due to weakening and lacking of yang energy, thus attracting unclean spirits. It was better to place an object made of iron at the head of the bed.

Gu Yun had never believed these nonsense superstitions from the common folk, but at this time he suddenly felt that perhaps there was some truth to them, or else how could it had been circulating for so many years?

He decided to leave the pair of iron shoulder guards and walked away from Chang Geng's bedroom in just his attire.

Marshal Gu might have been the natural nemesis of ghostly and evil spirits. Chang Geng was not at all bothered by these demons and slept soundly until morning.

It was a pity that after Chang Geng woke up, his facial

expression was even worse than if he didn't sleep.

He sat on the bed for a moment, his face green, and when he lifted the blanket to take a quick glance, he could not help but let out a deep sigh, the sound somewhat resembling a sob. Chang Geng rolled over and hugged his head.

This was the second time.

Chang Geng could no longer deceive himself. Because this time his dream was clear and true...

He had clearly and truly did disrespectful things to little yifu in his dream.

He buried his face in the blanket and screamed. He was utterly disgusted by himself, too ashamed to see anyone ever again. He wished nothing more than to simply hit his head against the bedpost and end his life now.

This time, even the ruined blade could not help calm him down.

Just as the boy was in a state of confusion and suffering, the sound of knocking on his door almost scared him out of his skin.

The first reaction was rolling up the bed sheets into a ball in a panic. He clenched his teeth, forcing his mind to stabilize, then dragged his feet over to open the door.

Unexpectedly, as he opened it, he was struck with a second wave of surprise.

Chapter 20: Teaching

T/N: sword training with yifu

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Sometimes, it would only take one brief moment for a young adolescent to go from "believing that they had already grown into an adult" to really and truly grow into an adult.

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Standing in front of the door was a figure which height was higher than a person and was made entirely out of iron. There were two small round eyes under the helmet, flashing purple, the color that was unique to the burning of Ziliujin - it invoked a frightening image, enough to be the main character in nighttime ghost stories.

The iron figure looked straight forward and over the top of Chang Geng's head, staring aimlessly behind him, lifting its hand the size of a bowl. Resembling a woodpecker, it continued to endlessly knock on his door.

Chang Geng's soul that was scared out of him was still doing its frantic dance in the air. He was not able to gather himself together. When he was already met with this situation, the hairs that had not been able to lie down stood up once again.

He took a deep breath then hurriedly stepped back, grabbing the sword hanging at the door.

At this moment, Gu Yun stepped out from behind the iron figure and asked with enthusiasm: "Interesting, isn't it?"

Chang Geng: "..."

Not!

"I know the family guards did not dare to use weapons against you, and from what I heard from Uncle Wang, you always practice

your swordsmanship by yourself in the courtyard every day, this could be quite dull and boring since you have no opponent,"

Gu Yun said while casually twisting and turned something at the back of its head, the terrifying iron monster instantly became perfectly still, standing motionlessly in one spot. Gu Yun raised his hand and patted its giant iron head. He smiled at Chang Geng and said: “Hence I brought a ‘sword training puppet’ for you to play with, ok?”

Chang Geng’s gaze didn’t dare to stay on him for too long, he looked up at the immobile iron monster resembling a mountain.

After a moment, he pointed at himself: "Me? Play with it?"

Isn't it the one who’s going to play with him?

Gu Yun pushed the iron puppet into the small courtyard where Chang Geng lived, Chang Geng tiredly follows behind.

The young boy’s conscience was still guilty with harboring inappropriate thoughts, although he was able to maintain the composure on his face, he only dared to sneak glances at Gu Yun whenever the man turned another way. After a few peeks, Chang Geng found that Gu Yun was not wearing much on him.

In the early winter morning where one's breath could turn into frost, Gu Yun only had on a single attire that was neither old or new. When slightly bending over to adjust the iron puppet, his waistline seemed to be a lot more slender than Chang Geng’s imagination.

Soon, Chang Geng realized that he was looking at a place he mustn't look. He quickly turned his head away in a panic and asked: “Are you not going out today?”

Gu Yun: “Yeah, I have a day off.”

Chang Geng was silent for a while, but unable to hold back, he asked: "How come you're dressing like this, isn't it very cold?"

"Don't copy Shen Yi and be lengthy, come here." Gu Yun beckoned him closer, he pulled the iron monster up again, then

patted the hard material of its shoulders.

"This is a variant of the iron puppet. It is different from the ordinary ones used as house guards, it is also called the sword training puppet. Many martial arts practitioners in the capital had this as their very first training mentor. I also used it when I was younger.

“It has several sets of fixed martial arts moves for beginners. There are seven points on its body: head, neck, chest, abdomen, shoulders, arms and legs. If you can stab any of the first four, it will stop immediately. But you should be careful if you touch the last three. Even if you can hit the shoulder and arm points, its legs can still move and could kick you at any time.

"If you want to lock it down, any points from both its shoulders and legs must be hit, how about you give it a try?"

Gu Yun’s explanation was not even as long as a fart, finished in a few sentences. Right after that, he immediately entered the simple and crude onhand practice session: "Hold your sword firmly!"

His sentence had not even finished, yet the puppet has already moved, its eyes were flashing with bright purple, charging forward and lifting its sword.

Chang Geng was not in a ready state, even his sword had not been pulled out. He hastily took a few steps back.

The puppet did not give him any room to breathe. Once it started, it immediately began pursuing Chang Geng incessantly, already cornering him in the blink of an eye.

Chang Geng had nowhere to run, so he clenched his teeth, gripped the sword with both hands, then swung from the bottom up. The two iron swords collide together - Chang Geng's wrist twitched, his sword directly fell off to the ground, cold sweat had started to break out. He subconsciously leaned back - the sword of the puppet landed at a distance of a hand grip in front of his forehead.

There was a ray of cold hue on the blade.

The small courtyard was silent, only Chang Geng's fierce gasping and the "rumbling" power in the body of the puppet could be heard.

Gu Yun did not make any comment, nor did he come forward to give any instruction. He sat down next to the stone table in the courtyard, took out a small cup, untied the wine jug at his waist, then watched Chang Geng be chased by the iron puppet as a complimentary dish for his drink.

As Chang Geng caught a glance of Gu Yun, his mood became furthermore unstable.

On one hand, he was like a young little peacock that has yet grow up, but already eager to show off his wings and tail for the other to look at. On the other hand, his inside was filled with worries and frustration, just looking at Gu Yun was already making him dizzy.

The flame of will in the juvenile's chest swayed back and forth between exploding and dying out. The puppet did not understand the situation, white steam spewed out under its feet, launching it forwards a few steps, once again using its starting stand and thrusted its sword towards Chang Geng.

Chang Geng put the sword on his shoulder and took the initiative to charge forward, desperately trying to remember the trick Gu Yun used to knock the sword out of his hand with a single dagger back in Governor Guo's house.

Gu Yun played with the small wine cup in his hand, clucked his tongue, shaking his head as he watched.

The edges of the two iron swords came in contact, sparks started to fly. The hilt of the sword created an unbearable pressure wave yet again. Chang Geng's sword was not able to reach the intended destination, but he was already out of strength, his sword ended up slipping off again and flew three feet away.

The puppet was used for sparring, it would not hurt people. The purple light in its eyes extinguished a few times. It retracted the sword hanging over the top of Chang Geng's head then backed away

once again, changing its standing posture.

Chang Geng's forehead started to sweat, he couldn't help but divert his focus and sneak a peek at Gu Yun again. He thought with annoyance: *"He is not going to leave today? What is so good to watch!"*

Gu Yun looked at Chang Geng's sword getting knocked out of his hands time and time again, finishing the entire jug of cold wine, his two long legs have alternated their position three times between up and down, extremely calm and patient. It was only when the puppet used a particularly heavy blow that got Chang Geng's whole body knocked away that he started to casually stand up.

Chang Geng scratched his skin as he fell to the ground, he could feel bits of blood as he reached over to touch the wounds, but he can't be bothered about wiping them off right now because Gu Yun had walked over to him, his arms crossed in front of his chest, looking at the tall iron puppet in front of him.

Chang Geng subconsciously bowed his head, utterly defeated. He did not dare to look at the other man.

"When your heart is in a panic - your legs will become unsteady," Gu Yun said. "If your feet are not stable, no matter how skilled your swordsmanship is, it would be nothing more than water without a source, trees without roots."

Chang Geng was startled then raised his head.

Gu Yun rarely spoke with such seriousness: "Get up, I will teach you."

Chang Geng was surprised at first, his eyes widened, and before he could react, Gu Yun had already pulled him back up again. He held on to Chang Geng's sword-handling arm and hugged him firmly from behind.

Chang Geng swallowed hard, his back tensed up.

Gu Yun whispered: "Let's relax, don't look at me, look at your sword."

He had not finished yet when the purple light in the puppet's eyes on their opposite side was already blazing once again, its body rumbled like a battle drum. It flew forward. Its movement did not change, its sword came slashing down their heads.

Even though deep in Chang Geng’s blood there was a contained certain kind of wildness, it could only be stimulated in life and death and rage-filled situations. And after all, this was only a sparring session.

At this moment, he couldn't afford to dwell on the closeness that was currently making him self-conscious and embarrassed. His first reaction was still to retreat, it was the natural reaction for anyone who was forced to face the giant monster's frightening pressure.

But Gu Yun did not allow him to retreat.

Chang Geng felt that his whole body had been lifted up by Gu Yun, rushed forward like a fearless puppet with no string. His wrist was molded tightly into Gu Yun's hand that was as solid as if it had been cast by iron, he involuntarily moved his sword under Gu Yun’s control, and in the brief moment his weapon connected with his opponent's, Chang Geng could sense that his sword handling hand was subtly tilted by Gu Yun in a different angle, and the sword that came slashing down by the puppet immediately got *driven* backward.

The cold iron blade passed him by, almost cutting through his temple. Chang Geng instinctively shut his eyes tightly, thinking that he was about to crash into the puppet.

Gu Yun sighed and thought: *"This child is slightly lacking in boldness, afraid that he might not the type of person who can take up the sword."*

The scent of cold metal passed by Chang Geng’s nose, and the puppet's elbow slightly stopped. Gu Yun lifted his foot, kicked Chang Geng's knee socket and shouted: "Open your eyes! Watch your arm!"

Chang Geng's knee got soft, his leg bounced upwards due to the external force, the tip of his foot hit the spot on the puppet's arm with complete precision.

The machine made a creaking sound, its upper arm was locked down in place. Chang Geng just managed to let out half of a breath, but in the next moment, his back was suddenly bent down by Gu Yun.

A fierce wind passed by his ears - the leg of the puppet swept across the air.

Gu Yun: "Look carefully."

He grasped Chang Geng's hand firmly and dragged the boy in a clear-cut semicircle on the ground. The tip of the sword swept passed the point on the puppet's ankle.

Another creaking sound rang out, it had completely locked down.

It retained the same posture, standing still in the same place. The purple light in its eyes flashed a few times then gradually dimmed.

Chang Geng’s palm was full of sweat, his chest violently raised up and down, he did not even notice when Gu Yun had let go of him.

In just this brief moment, he could instantly feel the wide gap in skills between himself and his little yifu.

Gu Yun casually brushed the dust off his body: "Retreating is a human nature. In fact, if your opponents are people, there is no problem in stepping back and retreating.

“But remember, if you are facing against iron puppets or Heavy Armor units while you yourself weren't equipped with armors - do not retreat. These units have Ziliujin-powered mechanism at their feet, they will catch up to you the moment you step back. As you do so, both your mind and your body's focus point will fall backward, it will become difficult to regain strength in a short amount of time to fight back, but instead, your arms and legs will become clumsy, and you will end up falling into the hands of your opponent."

Chang Geng thought for a long time, and suddenly asked: "What yifu meant to say was, if facing with enemies which are much more

powerful than oneself, direct confrontation will actually increase the odds of winning?"

Gu Yun raised his eyebrows, as this seemed rather strange: "Huh? How come you are calling ‘yifu’ today?"

Chang Geng was all good on all fronts, the only problem was that his mouth did not seem to understand manners, and always referred to him as “Shiliu”. Very annoying.

Gu Yun was born on the sixteenth of the first month - the childhood name ‘Shiliu’ also came from the First Princess. Except for the princess and the former emperor, even the old Marquis did not call him by this name. Although he did not mind much, having a little kid referring to him as ‘Shiliu this Shiuliu that’ day in and day out could also be quite frustrating.

According to his experience, Gu Yun felt that there were only two situations in which he could be called "yifu". One was if ‘the blind cat encountered a dead mouse’ - he accidentally delighted this little kid. The other was if ‘the cat stepped on the dog's tail’ - he accidentally provoked the brat.

Chang Geng deeply looked at him for a while, his expression complicated, then said: "I used to be ignorant in the past, I will not be this way anymore in the future."

He was finally aware of his own inexperience and incompetent, how could he dare to act as he pleased anymore.

Sometimes, it would only take one brief moment for a young adolescent to go from "believing that they had already grown into an adult" to really and truly grow into an adult.

Even for someone as careless as Gu Yun, he could also vaguely feel that there was something about Chang Geng that seemed to have changed.

Chapter 21: New Year's Eve

—

Gu Yun joked: "Tell me, what if one day I just suddenly die, what are we supposed to do then?"

—

It is impossible for the Marquis of Order to rest at home every day. A day of Great Liang's officials start with attendance at 5 or 7 in the morning, for a minority of low ranking idling officers, they can go home to their families after the court session ended at 3 or 5 in the after afternoon. But of course, Gu Yun was no low ranking idling officer.

Gu Yun rarely returned to the capital, hence even after the court session had ended, if he wasn't being summoned by the Emperor, then he's being looked for by other coworkers, his socializing schedule was packed with no room left to breathe. In the very rare occasion where there was a free day, he had to travel to the Northern camp to do one round of inspection. Being able to return to the manor before sundown was extremely rare.

In short, he lived a worse life than chickens and dogs.

Therefore, if one wanted Marshal Gu’s personal guidance, one must find him at the very early morning before the court session started.

From then on Chang Geng had been climbing up at the break of dawn and returning in the middle of the night. Every day when the chickens were still sound asleep, he would already bring the sword training puppet over to wait in Gu Yun's courtyard.

The adolescent was growing fast, his figure tall and thin, he led the way with a sword in hand, the iron puppet noisily following

behind. Its pair of iron arms stretched forward, on the left side hung a steam power lantern, a food container hung on the right, resembling a food delivery man.

When he arrived at Marshal Gu's, the old servant would take the container, then would start a small fire to keep the food warm with a stove. And Gu Yun will start his adopted son's early morning learning session.

The food delivery ‘man’ then would get completely beaten up, even worse than animals: truly tragic.

After the lesson was finished, their breakfast was also heated up. The two of them would have their meals together, then they would part ways to take care of their own things. Gu Yun had to leave, Chang Geng went back for the reading session with his teacher, and in the afternoon, he still had martial arts practice with the family guards in the Manor.

Truth was, Gu Yun was not a good teacher. Much like Shen Yi, he also had the habit of going on about whatever subjects that came to his mind. Very often as he finished fighting the iron puppet, he had already explained about how to dispatch and form Heavy Armors formations, what was the proper ratio between Heavy and Light Armor units to distribute to be the most efficient in saving Ziliujin, and even the differences between the horse breeds from the Western Regions and Central Plains, which type of ration was best for fighting against hunger, so on and so forth.

Only until these lectures took one trip around all of Great Liang that Gu Yun would finally become aware and ask Chang Geng: "Did I went off topic again? What did I intend to talk about at the start?"

Chang Geng: "..."

The two sat on the big metal feet of the puppet, combined with the "clacking" sound of the gears turning inside the body of the iron monster, and they would try to recall back on their original topic that had escaped for a thousand miles.

At the beginning, upon hearing that Marshal Gu was personally

passing on his knowledge, Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi were both extremely excited. After overcoming many difficulties and many suppressed yawns, they managed to run over to listen to his teaching. But unexpectedly, from the beginning until the end, they could only feel one thing - what is this!?

Ge Ban Xiao secretly commented: "I feel that it'd be better to listen to Teacher Shen's chanting."

"It's General Shen, how come you keep forgetting?" Cao Niangzi corrected him with irritation, he pondered for a moment, fighting to choose between 'beautiful man' and 'conscience'. In the end, his conscience won and he added, "I feel the same."

Only Chang Geng has absolutely no opinion. If he could stay by Gu Yun's side for just a while every day, then he would be content to even stand guard at the door all throughout the night. After all, his nights of sleep were nothing but repeated nightmares, nothing he'd be reluctant to let go of.

Much like how strongly he believed that he could restrain Bone of Impurity, he believed that he could become a sharp blade, scrape away all the unnecessary excesses every day, including his own strange thoughts about yifu.

What's more, Gu Yun's lectures were simply disorganized - if one would listen carefully, they will find that the matters he talked about were all valid and reliable.

Gu Yun was brought to the battlefields by his parents back when he was still very young, his few years living a comfortable life in the palace did not last long. At the age of fifteen, he began to follow an old veteran general marching to the South to suppress bandits. Since then, he had continued to roll around in the military until this day.

The seven major military factions, except for the Iron Dragons used for traveling on seas that he was not too familiar with - he had clashed with all the others. He had had victories, but also suffered many losses, thus for their strengths and weaknesses - he knew them like the palm of his hand.

Chang Geng listened to it all as if he was starving. Gu Yun was like a mountain to him - for him to look up to every day and find his direction forward, and with every step, trying to suppress the inappropriate thoughts he harbored in his heart.

However, Gu Yun did not consider this to be teaching.

He had especially invited a teacher and a martial arts instructor to teach Chang Geng. Every morning, whether it was giving Chang Geng pointers on fighting the iron puppet, or talking about whatever subjects to his knowledge - in Gu Yun's opinion, it was only him making some free time to come play with Chang Geng.

After a long period of observation, Gu Yun did not think that Chang Geng was suitable to walk the same path he did, Chang Geng always bore a gentle and restrained demeanor in front of him. Even though he could be somewhat stubborn at times, overall, he was still a sensible person.

Gu Yun thought that when the boy grew up, he should be a righteous and noble character, not a killer general that both demons and gods would not dare to come close to.

Just like that, the end of the year had arrived.

In the first year of the new emperor's enthronement, the Emperor changed his title to Long An, and announced that there would be amnesty for the entire country.

The country, of course, also included the barbarian Prince Jia Lai Yinghuo, who was currently imprisoned in the capital.

The Emperor had patiently suppressed this matter for more than two months and had finally used this roundabout method to express his opinion. The old Wolf King's condition of increasing ten percent tribute each year was simply too tempting, yet he did not want to disrespect Gu Yun directly at the same time, thus the matter was put aside after each and every discussion. The letters from both the Ministry of Revenue and the Marquis of Order were both delayed up

until the Festival to appease the Heaven - now they could finally see the result of this long and drawn out debate.

The capital guard forces lined up on both sides, Shen Yi ushered his horse and went straight to Gu Yun's side - who donned a Light Armor suit, then stopped.

Gu Yun looked at him then slowly turned his horse to walk back, Shen Yi quickly followed after him and whispered: "Grand Marshal, I see that this time His Majesty had firmly decided to ‘release the tiger back to its mountain’. What should we do?”

"The Son of Heaven* wishing to show his pledge to the God are prestigious words from the supreme ruler, how could there be any room for me to cut in?" Gu Yun said with a blank expression, "And in order to appease me, His Majesty had promised to supply the Black Iron Camp with thirty chariots and four hundred Iron Armors, his decree had also been passed on to Ling Shu Institute. His Majesty has done his best like this, how can I be so shameless as to continuing on pestering him with such a trivial matter?”

**In ancient China, the son of heaven is another way to refer to the Emperor.*

The new emperor was just over the age of thirty, compared with his father, he was much more strong-willed.

Gu Yun did not concern about power, whether the new Emperor was tough or not, he did not care, but the problem was that his policy on the matter of the border was even more nearsighted than that of his father.

The two men walked side by side in silence for a while, Gu Yun then said: "But it is also a fact that the treasury is empty. His Majesty just inherited the throne, it could not be helped that he was a bit rushed - you don't know, yesterday, the ‘big hat’ Western man sent a messenger over, they have talked so much all afternoon that my ears are still ringing now.”

"..." It took a moment for Shen Yi to react. "You mean the

Western Pope?"

In the heart of most Great Liang people, the Westerners had quite unacceptable behaviors - The 'Pope' never wanted to stay still in his temple, he and his big hat appeared everywhere, poking his nose into everything. At the same time, the words of their King held almost no value - isn't this the same as rebellious?

Gu Yun nodded: "They expressed that they wish to trade. I listened in for a while yesterday. They wanted to extend the Silk Road along the western territory to a large commercial road, both sides will be providing troops to guard and ensure that trades will be going smoothly. Their flowery words fall all over the place, even drew out a physical map for it already, painted out a large unrealistic profit in order to tempt His Majesty."

Shen Yi smiled: "Trading is a very good thing, what are you talking about?"

"I don't mean that trading is a bad thing - just that although I'm not very knowledgeable about doing business –" Gu Yun said, "– I still think that if the foreigners were to trade with our country, it might not be very beneficial for their side"

"If there was no benefit, why must they travel all the way here? It almost seemed as if they harbor ulterior motives."

This was the truth.

Western goods began to flow into Great Liang from the reign of Emperor Wu. There were carefully crafted little trinkets and playthings such as the glazed lamps and glasses. Unfortunately, it was not at all long-lasting, they only stayed fresh and new for a few years. Because the inflowing Western artifacts, although were very refined, many of them required to run on Ziliujin. The moment they landed in Central Plains, they had indirectly fueled the rampaging Ziliujin black markets.

Emperor Wu felt that if it kept going on like this, the country would soon fall. In order to strictly control the private use of Ziliujin

in the common folks, he prepared both soft and hard tactics. He had issued four decrees in one day, and thoroughly investigated the private use of Ziliujin - all the offenders were slain upon arrest, all of which were treated the same as rebellion, there would be no tolerance. They have first put on high-pressure approaches to preserve the lifeline of this country.

Later, Ling Shu Institute took the lead and gathered a large number of Mechanics from the common folks, assigned them to quickly work overtime to imitate loads of western goods with similar functions but powered by coals and winding mechanism.

The hard knife had tightened the way out of Ziliujin, and the soft knife directly cut off the market of Western goods. Even if one owned Ziliujin, who was not willing to use a cheaper fuel as an alternative? In addition, the designs of these Western products were tacky, and in the eyes of the Central Plains people, this was not quite up to their taste.

The genuine Western goods were quickly replaced by imitations, and the merchants' products were not able to sell in Central Plains.

Instead, delicately-made goods like silk were highly favored in Western countries.

Gu Yun said: "Perhaps I have thought too much."

Shen Yi was silent for a moment: "How did His Majesty react to this?"

Gu Yun's lips curled up to reveal a bitter smile. He said: "His Majesty had absolutely no fear. He feels that as long as the Black Iron Camp is keeping guard of the northwest, Great Liang will be invulnerable. Even I wasn't aware that I have such grand abilities, how could my head not hurt over this ?"

Shen Yi asked: "His Majesty said that in front of you?"

Gu Yun smiled in pain: "Not only did he say so, he even gifted me a fox fur coat."

Marshal Gu had the bad habit of only wearing a single layer of clothing all year round, this was well-known even among all the officers in the imperial court. Only when met with blizzards while stationed out in the border that he would add a few more layers. The Emperor now gifted him with proper winter clothing, it would be hard not to see the intention hidden in his words.

Shen Yi fell silent.

Gu Yun: "I will probably go back to the northwest after celebrating New Year. As long as the Black Iron Camp was still stationed here, His Majesty couldn't get a good night's sleep."

Thousands of miles of mountains and rivers had formed into a single line in the words of the new Emperor, weighing heavily on the shoulders of the Marquis of Order.

They felt that as he held the Black Iron Camp's three factions in his hands, he will remain invincible, triumphant in every battle, there was nothing he could not do.

They relied on him, yet they feared him, afraid of him.

Gu Yun joked: "Tell me, what if one day I just suddenly die, what are we supposed to do then?"

Shen Yi's expression changed, he scolded: "Cut that unfortunate talk!"

Gu Yun said with little care: "There is no need to avoid this subject, life and death, wealth and poverty, they are all up to fate. Us with the surname Gu, we don't have a single person who can live for long."

"And not only do we have a short lifespan, but the newer generation also downgraded from the ones before them. Back then whenever the old Marquis saw me, he always could not help but let out a deep sigh, and now as it comes to my generation, I...have no one to be my heir."

Shen Yi: "Don't you still have His Fourth Highness?"

Gu Yun shook his head: “That child is not fated to live a life bathing in mist and eating sand. Tch, on such a good New Year's Eve, why are we talking about these gloomy subjects? Go and order a Red Kite for me. I will go home to pick up my son."

He charged forward on his horse after he finished, leaving Shen Yi behind.

Shen Yi snarled angrily: "Why didn't you say so sooner? There are only twenty Red Kites in the entire capital, how am I supposed to get one when you only tell me today? "

Gu Yun: "You try to handle it-"

The word 'it' floated away, wrapped in the northwest wind, then hit Shen Yi in his face. The Marquis of Order had long disappeared down the road.

Chang Geng had been reading his book in the house in a very focused and diligent manner when suddenly the entrance was kicked open from the outside. Cold wind and snowflakes rushed in, swept through his stack of paper on the desk, causing them to scattered all over the floor.

This kind of troublesome nuisance could be none other than Gu Yun, Chang Geng reluctantly turned back: "Yifu."

Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi hopping alongside Gu Yun, one left and one right, waved their hands beckoning him altogether: "Big brother, big brother! The Marquis said he will take us to board the Red Kite!"

Chang Geng: "..."

Chang Geng naturally did not like to go outside, preferring peace rather than liveliness, not comfortable of having loads of people hanging around. Back then, the reason for him having to go to General Slope every day for his sword practice was because his yard was not big enough. Since arriving at the Marquis manor, he had no intention of going outside for a stroll.

In his opinion, as the year came to an end, for celebrating the New Year, won't it be much better for everyone to gather around by a small stove at home, heating up two pots of wine while they talk and chat?

Why must one go out to drink the cold wind while watching crowds of people?

But Gu Yun has already taken the initiative and took his outer coat down: "Hurry up, don't drag your feet, Uncle Wang said that you have not set foot outside the door ever since you moved to the manor, are you planting mushrooms here?"

Just imagining the sea of countless people out there, Chang Geng already got goosebumps all over. He could not find the joy even if it means going together with Gu Yun, thus he stood still, trying to make up an excuse: "Yifu, we must be mindful about new year celebration, someone must stay behind to watch the house, I... -Ah!"

Gu Yun did not allow him any room to speak, he immediately wrapped the coat around Chang Geng, then regarded him like a house post that knew how to shout, and directly carried him out of the manor on his shoulder: "This kid, still young but being way too ‘mindful’ already."

The author has something to say:

Discussing foolproof methods to deal with a little nerd - wrap him up and carry him away =w=

Chapter 22: Aboard

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Chang Geng suddenly had a strong desire to grow strong immediately.

—

Chang Geng blushed red from the top of his head down to the tip of his toes, cooked until crispy on the outside, tender on the inside, emitting smokes. He was angry to the point of not being able to make a single sound.

Yet at the same time, Cao Niangzi utterly adored being regarded as a house post like this, almost drooling as he watched Marshal Gu's figure from behind. He said to Ge Ban Xiao: "If in this life I can also be carried by the Marquis for even just once, then... I can truly die without regret!"

Ge Ban Xiao, upon hearing this, immediately wiped his nose then got into a firm stance, sucking in his stomach - in the readied position to carry a large bag, and patted his shoulder: "Come up!"

Cao Niangzi stared at him for a moment, then pursed his lips and let out a spit, and ran out of the gate in anger.

On New Year's Eve, all forbidding regulations were lifted.

Outside, Gu Yun still remembered to save his son some dignity and finally put him back down.

Chang Geng's expression darkened, walking forward with long strides. His back was straight enough to serve as a flagpole, the cloak flowing behind him. His figure already bore the resemblance of his future self - tall and strong.

Gu Yun rubbed his nose, quickly catching up to him and shamelessly asked: "Are you angry?"

Chang Geng slapped away the hand on his shoulder then replied coldly: "I do not dare to!"

Gu Yun: "Hiding in the house all day like this, won't you feel tired? Little kids..."

Chang Geng solemnly glared at him, and for once Gu Yun understood the situation. He corrected himself: "*People of young age* - people of young age should be a little more energetic. Only have lived for a few years, yet you're already bored of the mortal world?"

Chang Geng had no other response for this type of lively yifu, his face remained expressionless, once again intending to slap away Gu Yun's hand currently pulling him. But unexpectedly, as he just happened to touch Gu Yu's fingertips, he was immediately taken aback and shivered at how cold they were.

Chang Geng frowned, he grasped Gu Yun's hand and found that it was completely frozen, cold enough to have turned blue as if it belonged to a dead body that had just been brought up from the ground. There was no Ziliujin burning inside people. Running around with merely one layer of clothing in this harsh winter, how could one not feel cold?

Chang Geng was hurt inside, hurt enough to further fuel the anger in his heart. He sulked while untying his own cloak, then wrapped it around Gu Yun without any explanation. Gu Yun was forced to bend down as Chang Geng did so, but he did not avoid, he simply stood still and let Chang Geng tie the string for him. Gu Yun smiled, enjoying the filial piety that was soaked in anger, and he thought to himself:

"It truly is very nice to have a child, wait after Xiao Chang Geng

grows up, I should go find someone to give birth to my own - it would be even better to have a girl."

For the New Year's Eve, after each hour passed by, there would be a long trombone sounding out in the capital, prompting people of the approaching new year.

The city was engulfed in the loud sound of drums and firecrackers, countless red papers flew in the air like butterflies. The riverside, high buildings, the middle of the streets, they were all packed with people. Chang Geng felt numb at just one glance – it truly seemed as if people from all over the world were crowded into the small city of Sijiu. Compared with this kind of excitement, the crowds of people pushing and pulling at the market gathering in Yanhui town simply feel desolated and lonely.

Whether it was forcing him to go out or the eager Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi, at this moment, in Chang Geng's eyes, they were all so unreasonable. He was holding onto the cold hand of Gu Yun, trying to warm it up as much as he could, while still paying attention to the two countryside children enthusiastically looking around so they wouldn't get lost. Even though there were already a few incredible Black Iron Camp guards with them, he was still immensely busy with worrying.

Some people might have been born to constantly be concerned.

At this moment, a long sound resembling both an eagle and a crane was heard in the air, and the crowd loudly cheered.

"Red Kite!"

"Look, the first Red Kite of the year took off!"

The Capital was the primary territory right under the emperor, and normally air travel was banned. All nine gates were loaded with countless Baihong arrows. Even for Black Eagles, if they dared to approach the capital on air, they will still be shot down immediately.

New Year's Eve was the only exception.

On the wide road leading directly to the outskirt of the capital stood the symbol of the entire Central Plains - 'Qi Yuan Tower'.

It was said that when the Westerners crossed the sea on their large ships arriving in Central Plains, there were only two things they knew of: one was the Imperial Palace, and the other was Qi Yuan Tower*.

**the 鸢 [yuān] - meaning Kite in Qi Yuan tower (起鸢楼) is the same as the Yuan in Giant Kite and Red Kite. Qi (meaning 'raise up') Yuan tower is a building/platform for the kites to take off to the sky.*

The Qi Yuan Tower was not a building. It was built by the Former Emperor in the twenty-first year of the Yuan He regency from cutting down military expenses. It welcomed visitors from all over the world, and was divided into two regions: North and South. The Northern area had numerous platforms with high-ceilinged domes, named 'Yunmeng Grand View'. The Southern area had a tall tower, some people mockingly called it 'Zhai Xing* platform:, but of course, no one would dare use that name directly, and it was normally referred to as the 'Ting Yuan** platform'.

**Zhai Xing(摘星) translates to 'star-plucking' or 'star-picking'. The tower was very high hence its name.*

***again, the yuan here is the same as the yuan in Kite as mentioned above. Ting 停- meaning to stop, Ting Yuan platform means the place where the kites can land down.*

The tower and the imperial palace facing each other from opposite directions, took the meaning of north and south, heaven and earth.

Every year on New Year's Eve, Ting Yuan platform would become the center of the entire capital. Many famous actors and courtesans from across the country all wished to come up to contribute at least one song, countless people formed into a vast crowd under the platform to watch, and the sight-seeing platform of Yunmeng Grand View was also packed with various high-class

officials and nobilities.

At about seven o'clock in the evening, twenty 'Red Kites' would be taking off.

The working mechanism of the Red Kite was similar to that of the Giant Kite, the only difference between them was the sheer name of the Giant Kite was enough to make the barbarians tremble in fear, while the Red Kite was solely used for entertainment.

It was a type of ship, two fiery red koi fishes engraved on both ends, and could take off to the sky using eighty-one flaming wings. The body of the ship was secured on the platform using a special type of rope that was translucent, resembling a spider web.

When the flaming wings were ignited, more than twenty Red Kites as radiant as red kois will be steadily hoisted in the air, looking extremely beautiful as they swayed slightly.

The view from above the kite was excellent. There were sets of elegant rooms and a circle of terraces. Drinks and food must be carried along the cobweb-like ropes, and the people on board could see the red palace walls and countless lanterns light up from the capital below.

Gu Yun led the three children up from the small path next to the platform. The guard was shocked as he recognized him right away, he was about to bow down to pay respect when Gu Yun stopped him: "There is no need for such formality, I'm only taking the children here to play – have you seen General Shen?"

A waiter ran up to him from far away: "Marquis sir, please, this way, General Shen is waiting for you on the Red Kite."

Gu Yun nodded calmly, but he couldn't help but feel quite impressed on the inside - he actually only brought Chang Geng here to join in on the fun, he completely did not expect Shen Yi to be so incredible as he managed to actually successfully order a Kite.

Ge Ban Xiao stared at the Red Kite in front, then followed after Gu Yun and asked: "Marquis sir, are we going to Heaven?"

Gu Yun: "No need to rush, we will after a few decades. Today we will only step on it for a while."

Chang Geng listened to the fortune-filled dialogue of these two people on the night of new year's celebration, truly wishing to simply seal their mouth shut.

In the chamber on the Red Kite, the temperature was as warm as springtime. As Gu Yun entered, he untied the cloak and put it on the back of the chair.

Shen Yi had already hailed a table packed with wines and many dishes. There were also some beautiful young male and female servants in the room, the particularly bold ones dared to continuously sneak glances at Marquis Gu.

Gu Yun's eyes widened - Shen Yi was a scholarly bookworm who had already gone senile before his age. He even feared that looking at Western paintings would defile his eyes, how could he possibly keep a group of young meats around like this?

When Gu Yun casted him a questioning eye, Shen Yi whispered in his ear: "This is the ship that *Wei Wang* insisted on giving to you upon hearing you require one."

Gu Yun momentarily did not know what to say, his expression unfathomable.

The waiter truly knew how to read the situation, he immediately came forward to ask: "Marquis sir, will we be igniting the engine?"

Gu Yun paused then nodded: "Yes go ahead – and also call the brothers guarding on the terrace to come inside for dinner, there are no outsiders today, no need to be over-courteous."

The waiter, upon receiving the instruction, immediately withdrew from the Red Kite, jumped onto the terrace deck, and made a long signal.

A few of the soldiers of the Black Iron Camp came in, all lined up in a well-trained manner: "Grand Marshal!"

The coldness of their Black Armors pierced through the soft gentle aura inside the room in an instant, the unspeakable atmosphere that hung in the air was suddenly dispelled.

Gu Yun glanced at the servants retreating. One particularly pleasant-looking young girl sneaked a peek at him, flirtatious hints filled her gaze. Gu Yun smiled at her in response, at the same time feeling somewhat disappointed, as he's bringing three little kids along. This type of night time entertainment must also end at this 'eyeing back and forth' stage.

Shen Yi cleared his throat, and Gu Yun retracted his sight as if nothing happened. He complained: "*Wei Wang* is already a grown man yet he could still be so improper."

Shen Yi let out an absolutely unamused laugh: "Ha ha."

Fortunately, the three young children were attracted by the group of flaming wings surrounding the Red Kite that had been lit up. They all looked around outside the window and did not notice what improper business the adults were secretly doing inside.

The sizzling sound of the flaming wings sounded out and a warm hot air swept by the window, Chang Geng almost lost his footing, he could not help but grasp onto the wooden window to steady himself. Next to him, Cao Niangzi was screaming, the whole body of the Red Kite vibrated gently and took off to the sky.

At 7 in the evening, a group of fireworks was shot up from Ting Yuan platform, shining brightly in the middle of twenty Red Kites, and the cobweb-strings connected to each other were dyed in orange.

The platform was slowly raised, the iron gears underneath interlocking with each other. A female dancer donned in a red dress appeared, singing with a pipa in her hands.

The most prosperous imagery in all heaven and earth could only be this.

Shen Yi opened a bottle of wine, raised his hand to pour a cup for Gu Yun: "This is the first year of tribute from the Western Regions after the rebellion is settled. The best kind of grape wine and a luminous cup, delicious wines must go in pair with heroes, have a sip."

Gu Yun stared at the luminous cup for a moment, his expression slowly became solemn. He took one sip then immediately put it down - not that the wine was not sufficient, but he could not help the sorrow hanging in his heart.

Gu Yun: "Forget it, I'm not quite used to this type of wine, change to Shaoxing yellow wine. It seems that I am no hero, but a coward - here, all you gentlemen take your seat, don't worry about the children, they have eaten at home, let them play."

While chatting, he began to feel that his line of sight has become a bit blurry. He bowed down and pinched the bridge of his nose, knowing that the medicine he took a few days ago would soon wear out.

The time for the medicine's effectiveness to fade away is about half an hour, and generally, before this occurs, he will slowly lose his sight and hearing.

When Shen Yi noticed this small gesture, he immediately knew what was going on: "Marshal?"

"It's nothing," Gu Yun shook his head, changed the wine, and raised his cup towards everyone sitting at the table.

"All of you are the one in a million, mighty warriors of Great Liang, you have all ventured out on the battlefields by my side, although there is neither wealth or riches, power or influence, only the harsh living condition of the borders, and the measly paying wage. You all have had to endure so much. I first dedicate this cup to all my brothers."

When Gu Yun finished his speech, he tilted his head to down the cup, then once again pour himself another one:

"The second cup, I dedicate to the brothers who had laid down in the Western Regions, that year with my inexperience and incompetence, I led them forward, yet I was not able to bring them back..."

Shen Yi advised: "Marshal, New Year is coming, please don't say any more."

Gu Yun smiled a bit, he really did stop going further, he down the cup then filled it up again.

"The third cup," Gu Yun whispered, "is dedicated to the Heaven and the Earth, I wish for Gods above to treat the souls of my comrades with kindness."

Chang Geng stood by the window. No one knew when the beautiful scenery outside could no longer attract him. He turned and stared at Gu Yun without blinking.

He had seen Gu Yun being enthusiastic and energetic, he had also seen Gu Yun being shamelessly lazy.

But he had never seen Gu Yun making a toast and drink in such loneliness before. To him, this image of his yifu was almost unfamiliar.

Thinking about it, Gu Yun had never gotten angry in front of him, and he rarely ever showed exhaustion or annoyance. It seemed that he was always teasing Chang Geng, he was both endearing and irritating — except for his usual appearance, other countless emotions inside him were completely sealed away from Chang Geng.

Because he was just a child who couldn't do anything.

Chang Geng suddenly had a strong desire to grow strong immediately.

At this time, Ge Ban Xiao turned around and shouted: "Marquis sir! General Shen! The Westerner brought a lot of wild beasts out to dance! Come and see!"

Chapter 23: Fierce Tiger

T/N: the explanation for our username.

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"I am the flower of the Black Iron Camp's three factions, whose reputation run far across the ocean."

—

Gu Yun slowly took out a Liuli glass and placed it on the bridge of his nose. He casually walked over to Chang Geng's side, pushed open the window, and narrowed his eyes to look at the parking platform.

The Liuli glass was equipped with a thin chain of white gold hanging behind the ear, covering one peach blossom eye, making the bridge of his nose become seemingly straighter. His whole temperament suddenly gave off a cold aura resembling an animal in the cloth of human.

Chang Geng stared at him for a while and asked: "Yifu, what are you wearing?"

Gu Yun teased him: "A little accessory from the Western foreigners, does it look good? It is a fashionable trend for the people over there to wear this. Let me go stroll one round outside later and bring back a Western stepmother for you, okay?"

Chang Geng: "..."

A little soldier belonging to the Black Eagle faction attempted to ease the heavy atmosphere in the room. He smartly said: "Marshal, you are not the blood-related father either!"

Gu Yun laughed along without a care.

The little soldier shook his head and said: "The world has become different in the past few years, and the hearts of the people also changed. Before, women used to value our virtues and

temperament, we didn't have to worry. But now it's the opposite, they only care about whether men are good-looking or not. Marshal, us brothers are not single because we're unsightly, but simply because we were born in the wrong era."

The local specialty of the Black Iron Camp was single men. When hearing these words, all the others noisily followed suit.

Gu Yun laughed out loud: "Get off, don't group me into it! Who is unsightly? I am the flower of the Black Iron Camp's three factions, whose reputation run far across the ocean."

The group of rough and crude military men was utterly shocked by the shamelessness of their own marshal and had no other choice but to burst out laughing. Shen Yi said coolly: "Marshal, if you are as beautiful as a flower, how come you can't also find a wife then?"

Gu Yun's grievance was poked in just one sentence, Marshal Gu had to cover his chest and said: "I'm holding off waiting for the price to go up, all good things must be saved for last. What do you know?"

Speaking of this matter, one truly could not place the blame on Gu Yun.

Back then, the former Emperor's feelings for him was quite contradictory. He loved Gu Yun, yet he was cautious of him at the same time. It was fine when he was a child, but as he grew older, the marriage of the young Marquis became a fish bone stuck in the throat of the former Emperor.

If choosing someone from a lowly family, he was afraid that people would criticize for he had mistreated the descendant of a loyal subject, the former Emperor won't be able to stop the masses from talking no matter what his reasoning might be. But if he chose someone from a highly influential family, he would feel nothing but anxiety.

Both choices were difficult faced with this dilemma. Perhaps in that year, the former Emperor had wished that Gu Yun was only a little eunuch.

The matter of the Marquis of Order's marriage had been dragging on and been delayed for a long time, and finally, the Emperor chose the daughter of grand scholar Guo.

Guo family had generation after generation of highly educated scholars, they were both influential and pure. Young Lady Guo was said to be as beautiful as an orchid, her talents and knowledge were renowned all throughout the capital. That year, together with the crowned prince's wife - who was the current Empress - they made up the Capital's pair of Beauties. This choice won't have any personal benefit involved, and won't disgrace Gu Yun.

But it was really strange, ever since after their engagement, this renowned flower seemed to have been covered in frost. She began to grow ill and became weaker and weaker every day - in the end, without waiting for Gu Yun to come back victoriously from the frontline, Miss Guo had already passed away.

Thinking about it, there were many people whose wives passed away, it was nothing out of the norm, let alone a fiancée who has not been wedded yet. But as this matter involved the Marquis of Order, it was hard for people not to recall his lonesome grandfather who lost all his wives and children, and the passing of Gu Yun's own parents when he was young.

So just like that, the reputation of the Marquis whose fate countered his own wife started to spread out throughout the capital.

Being wed to the Marquis of Order was a great blessing. Aside from many gains, there's no need to serve the in-laws either. But even with blessings as grand as heaven, one must stay alive to be able to enjoy them.

Later, Gu Yun had to run back and forth between the Nothern Frontier and the Western Region, he did not return to the capital for the past four or five years, and there was no opportunity to take care of this matter. Now that the former emperor was gone, and although the current emperor was older than Gu Yun by a few years, he had been referring to Gu Yun as Royal Uncle ever since his childhood. They were separated by a generation. Even if one was the monarch and the other was a subject, it was still not convenient for him to

manage Gu Yun's marriage arrangement.

Gu Yun himself did not have the energy to be concerned about it, and thus this matter got delayed until the present.

Shen Yi refused to spare him: "Raising the price? Who do you want to sell yourself to?"

Gu Yun looked up, and through the Liuli glass, saw that Chang Geng was staring at him intently, his expression quite tense. Gu Yun assumed that the boy was worried that after getting married, Gu Yun won't love him anymore.

He raised his hand and patted Chang Geng's head in an attempt at comforting: "I like someone who is intelligent, gentle and kind. Rest assured, I definitely won't bring back a Ha Dong lion* to bully you."

**a term to referring to women who are ferocious and violent.*

This line seemed to have carved out a hole in the chest of Chang Geng, it seemed like the indecent ideas he once thought he had successfully suppressed used this chance to rise up once again to make a fuss, filling him with sorrow and hopelessness, with no place to free them to.

He had to force himself to squeeze out a stiff smile.

With the same effort he used every night to force himself to sleep.

At this moment, there was a sudden noise on Ting Yuan platform, a mixture of both drumming sounds and cheering. A few Westerners who were dancing with monkeys and parrots all withdrew from the stage. Afterwards, a large iron cage covered with a piece of cloth was brought up. A Western clown in white makeup twisted and turned as he set up a large flaming hoop, and after hovering and posing for a while in an attempt to stir up enough curiosity and interest from the crowd, the cover was finally lifted up.

There was an enormous tiger in the cage!

Ge Ban Xiao leaned his whole body out of the window and asked: "Is it real or fake? Is that a real tiger?"

The clown opened the iron cage and led the tiger out by its collar.

There was no telling if whether it was because there were too many people watching that the tiger seemed quite irritated and restless. It wouldn't stop making struggling movements.

Gu Yun frowned and said coldly: "This group of foreigners really know how to be courteous. Bringing out a wild beast like this for New Year celebration - Xiao Jia!"

The young Black Eagle soldier who talked the most just now responded: "Yes!"

Gu Yun: "Go find people to keep an eye out, there are countless onlookers below, don't let anything happen."

Xiao Jia, upon receiving his order, immediately jumped off directly from the terrace of the Red Kite. Where they currently resided was about thirty meters from the ground below. His shadow flashed, leaving a thin white steam in the air, then disappeared in the blink of an eye.

In the midst of the loud noises, the uneasy tiger began to reluctantly jump through the ring of fire, its face appeared ferocious as if being forced to act against its will.

On Yunmeng Grand View, rounds after rounds of cheers and claps rang out, the next one louder than the last, there were some who began to throw money down in the heat of the moment.

While watching performances, it was not uncommon for the overexcited crowd to throw a few harmless coins down to Ting Yuan platform. Many people did this, but today no one knew from where, but a careless and moronic watcher directly threw gold leaves down below.

The lively crowd who was watching under the stage suddenly blew up, many shouts of *'look, there is gold!*' sounded out endlessly.

But before anyone could get to the gold, the tiger that was jumping through the flaming hoop completely became agitated. It snarled and turned around taking a chunk out of the unguarded clown.

The clown's arm and shoulder were immediately bitten off on the spot. He let out a bloodcurdling scream.

The tiger roared, broke free of control, and charged towards the sea of people under Ting Yuan platform.

The people from the inner circle were utterly frightened by the beast, trying to flee for their lives, while the people from the outer circle were still unaware of the situation. Somehow hearing that people were fighting for gold leaves inside, they continued to squeeze in.

Both sides, one pushing, one shoving, no one was able to move.

Someone shouted 'gold', the other cried 'tiger'. There were some who had fallen to the ground, unable to get up. The situation was quickly plunged into complete chaos.

The night guards were also smashed into by the crowd. There was no shortage of officials and nobility in Qi Yuan Tower - many of them did not put the lives of ordinary people in their eyes. In a rush, they were only concerned about their own, and even while escaping, they still couldn't forget their images, ordering their servants to clear a path for them.

Gu Yun grabbed Chang Geng's shoulder and pushed him back, then picked up the arrow and the longbow that Shen Yi hung behind the door and told him: "Don't come out."

The Black Iron Camp soldiers sitting at the table all stood up.

Shen Yi held onto Gu Yun's elbow and blurted out: "Your eyes..."

Chang Geng was sharp, he immediately lifted his head and thought: *"Eyes? What happened to his eyes?"*

Gu Yun ignored it and pulled his arm away, then kicked open the

door of the Red Kite.

Several Eagle units on the Red Kite leaped down from above, flying low to the ground. Few small fireworks blasted out in cold light. Another Black Iron Armor soldier who stood at a higher place began to climb up the signaling pole of the Red Kite, holding a *tong hou* in his hand. He shouted towards the chaotic crowd: "The Marquis of Order is here, do not cause a commotion!"

This sentence was actually more effective than hearing the Emperor's sacred decree. Many people instinctively stopped pushing and shoving immediately upon hearing three words: 'Marquis of Order'.

The tiger's howling came from a distance, and the raging beast rushed out like a lightning bolt, a young man was pressed under its claws. Gu Yun stood on the head of the koi fish ship, leaned on the window, tilted his body and began to pull the arrow.

His Liuli glass still sat on the bridge of his nose - no one ever wore a Liuli glass for shooting, this thing would cause the field of vision to become inaccurate. His thin clothing flew in the hot wind of the flaming fins, his figure gave off an indescribable arrogant aura. It truly was like doing archery with closed eyes.

However, Shen Yi knew that if Gu Yun were to take off his glass in this moment, he won't be able to differentiate between human and beast, basically not that much different from closing his eyes.

Why must it happen in this life and death situation?

Shen Yi hands's broke out a layer of thin sweat involuntarily, his back tightened up.

In this moment, Gu Yun let go of the bowstring.

Chapter 24: Bewitching Monk

—

His eyes were clear, and there seemed to be a sea of serene stars inside...

—

The arrow was like a meteor, flying straight through the complex cobweb-rope system under twenty Red Kites, and pierced the back of the tiger's head. There was no telling how much force the arrow held, but it had directly pierced the thick and large skull of the beast. It swayed, then slammed to the ground, dead before it could make any noise.

Gu Yun's hands did not stop there, pulling the string again with the second arrow, his back leaning on the door frame, then turned at an angle. Almost without aiming, the arrow was released. The target was the one who threw gold leaves on the observation deck.

There was a scream on the deck, the arrow grazed past a foreigner's head, nailing his hat to the nearby post, the tail of the arrow still vibrating greatly.

The man fell flat on the floor from his chair.

Gu Yun put away the longbow. He turned to speak to the Black Armor soldier on the pole: "Plotting to harm people, arrest him for questioning."

Only now that the man who was pinned down by the tiger slowly gathered himself together, letting out small sobs. The surrounding people were in the same frightening stage and someone moved forward to help him get out.

Under Ting Yuan platform, an inconspicuous and thin figure disappeared into the crowd, using the commotion to get on board a boat that was not far from there.

As soon as he arrived, he untied his headscarf, revealing a black-

haired, black-eyed man, his appearance somewhat resembling Central Plains people. He was quickly allowed into the room inside to meet the one who had been waiting for him.

It was a man near middle age, dressed in a white garment and a red robe with complicated embroidery. A strangely shaped and sinister scepter was set beside him, his curly dark brown hair was combed neatly, left hanging on his shoulders, with a large ceremonious ring on his finger.

It was the messenger sent by the Pope.

The small framed black-haired foreigner respectfully got down on one knee: "Bishop."

The bishop's upper body leaned forward slightly, indicating that he was listening.

"I am afraid the result is just as you have predicted," said the black-haired man. "In the heart of these Easterners, Gu and his family bear some sort of symbolic meaning, as long as the 'black crow' flies through the night sky, even if faced with a bigger crisis, these foolish people will be blindly stabilized like a herd of sheep who have found their shepherd dog. This unreasonable belief of theirs is difficult to comprehend, even if in my opinion, many of them don't even know Gu Yun's full name."

The bishop pondered for a moment: "The 'seed' did not cause any casualties."

"Hardly any," the black-haired man bowed his head. "The Marquis of Order happened to be on the Red Kite as well, I don't know if his men were soon arranged to mixed into the crowd, or our people had leaked traces of their whereabouts, or if he himself possesses exceptional ability in sensing critical situations. As soon as we planted the seed, the black crows immediately reacted. Gu had killed the seed with one shot of arrow from the Red Kite, and had arrested the 'seeder' at the same time."

The bishop leaned back on the carved chair, his fingers stroking his beard: "This is not Gu's personal prestige, but the accumulation of

three generations altogether. The Central Plains people blindly placed their trust in these black crows, almost forming some kind of firm beliefs for the Gu family."

Black-haired man: "The Church has long discussed why there are frequent loopholes in Eastern society, but somehow their people were able to maintain this ragged peace. I think this belief is also one of the reasons."

The bishop stood up and took a few steps on the boat with his hands on his back."

"This is our chance," he murmured, "And not at all an unfortunate event - I must write to the Pope, we can put the Lou Lan* plan into action immediately."

**Lou Lan is a country located along the Silk Road.*

At this time, the situation on Qi Yuan tower had finally stabilized. The Royal guards quickly arrived for assistance and Gu Yun recognized that his work here was done. He made a gesture to Shen Yi, signaling for them to leave now. His sight was already very blurry, and his hearing was also decreasing, the surrounding noise of the commotion slowly became quieter.

Gu Yun said to a Black Eagle guard: "I am going ahead first to take care of something. You follow His Highness. If they are willing to go home, wait after everything had settled down before you do so. If they want to play some more on the Red Kite, let them be. I don't know if they will perform anymore."

Chang Geng asked: "Yifu, what about you?"

At this moment, Gu Yun could no longer hear what he was saying anymore. He just patted the boy's shoulder and hurried away.

The rumbling noise came from under their feet became louder, the Red Kite slowly landed on Ting Yuan platform. Gu Yun and Shen Yi walked out side by side. The night frost was heavy. Chang Geng held the cloak that Gu Yun left behind in his hands, trying to catch up to them until a Black Eagle soldier prevented him.

The soldier said: "His Royal Highness, please stay. Grand Marshal does not wear winter clothes in the capital, the situation outside is still chaotic, please don't leave your subordinate."

A suspicion suddenly arose in Chang Geng's heart - why won't he wear it? With Gu Yun's body, it's obviously not because he wasn't afraid of the cold.

There were also the words '*your eyes'* that Shen Yi called out with anxiousness that also made him feel like there was a bone stuck in his throat.

Chang Geng couldn't help but be reminded of the 'playing blind and deaf' Shen Shiliu back in Yanhui Town. Of course, the eyes and ears of Shen Shiliu were partially an inconvenience for him to use to play tricks, but Chang Geng had confirmed that there were situations where he truly could not see. Was it simply to fool Xiu Niang and those barbarians who intended to infiltrate the Northern Frontier?

The more he thought, the more likely for him to become anxious. Chang Geng's heart was suddenly filled with unease, even up until the soldier had diligently escorted them back to the Marquis' manor, the feeling still won't subside.

Chang Geng returned to his room, he wasn't able to fall asleep even after tossing and turning. After sending Cao Niangzi and Ge Ban Xiao away, he quietly put on his coat and ran to Gu Yun's chamber to wait.

Gu Yun's place was very clean, with a kind of neatness and cleanliness seen in military men, and no excessive decoration. There were a few books on the desk, a used steam-powered lamp, and a calligraphy hanging on the wall, it read: "*The World Cannot Be Avoided*", it appeared to be Gu Yun's own handwriting.

In addition to a brand new fox fur coat hung on the bed, the Marquis's bedroom was almost shabby.

Chang Geng waited for a while and unknowingly fell asleep on the small table. As his chest was pressed, he soon dreamed of unsightly things.

In a haze, Gu Yun seemed to be standing in front, with his back towards him. Chang Geng in the dream was not restrained by shackles of the boundary, his action was a lot bolder than in reality, he intimately pulled Gu Yun from behind: "Yifu."

Gu Yun slowly turned back, but his eyes sockets were completely hollow, two streams of blood like tears trickle down his cheeks: "Calling me?"

Chang Geng screamed and sit up, cold wind sweeping in through the entrance. He stared at the person coming from outside in a daze.

Gu Yun did not expect that Chang Geng was actually in his room, he quickly closed the door and asked: "Why are you here?"

His voice was hoarse and his face also appeared to be unwell.

The cold air hanging in Chang Geng's chest was finally able to come out when he saw Gu Yun. For a moment, he wasn't able to distinguish between dreams from reality, he almost had the ecstasy in being able to find something again after he thought it was gone.

Gu Yun stood by the door frame for a moment, endured a wave of dizziness, and weakly beckoned Chang Geng: "Come and help me - I still have to bring you into the palace tomorrow to greet His Majesty for the new year, be careful of not being able to get up on time."

Chang Geng held his elbow and helped him get to the bedside: "Yifu, what's the matter with you?"

"On the way back, they dragged me along to the Northern Camp, I have had a bit too much." Gu Yun didn't bother taking his shoes off and fell to the bed on his back. He just took the medicine, his head was still pounding, he said tiredly: "Go back to rest early."

Chang Geng's brows wrinkled - Gu Yun's body did have the scent of wine, but it was not heavy, and his speeches were clear, not at all appearing like he 'had too much'.

However, he did not wait for him to ask again. Gu Yun had gone silent, falling asleep the moment his head touched the pillow.

Chang Geng had to remove his shoes and socks by himself and pulled the quilt over for him. He always felt that the chill on Gu Yun's body could never be warm, he burned the steam brazier in the room a notch higher and rested by the bedpost, quietly looking at Gu Yun's sleeping face.

"I don't let my imagination run astray." He repeated the words inside three times, and then, like an anxious little animal, he slightly came closer to Gu Yun, as if wanting to sniff the smell on the other's body, but involuntarily held his breath.

The next day, even when Chang Geng felt that he had just closed his eyes and his nightmare did not have time to complete yet, Gu Yun had already waken him up. He joylessly followed Marshal Gu to the palace to greet his older brother in name - Emperor Long An.

On the way, Gu Yun said: "Regardless of how His Majesty treats you, you shouldn't pay it much mind. When the Grand Empress was alive, she did not get along very well with the Royal Consort, but it was the matter of the older generation and has nothing to do with you...Damn it, what bad luck."

Chang Geng was absent-mindedly listening when he heard him curse under his breath. Chang Geng looked up to find that Gu Yun was staring at a carriage with a scowl.

It was the carriage of Hu Guo Temple.

Great Liang's royal family practiced Buddhism, and even Gu Yun's resolute Grandfather was no exception. Especially the current Emperor, in every occasion where he had some free time, he would always love to sit and discuss all kinds of matters with the head monks.

But to talk about Gu Yun's most hated thing, it's not the foreigners on four sides but these bald heads.

In particular, the vulture old abbot of Hu Guo Temple had a crow mouth, and from an early age, he asserted that Gu Yun would bear ill affinity and counter the fates of all his relatives.

The Marquis of Order had placed all his anger of not being able to get married to the monks of Hu Guo Temple.

The personal assistant of Long An Emperor Li Feng slowly ran out as he saw Gu Yun coming.

The man was sturdy and almost as tall as Marshal Gu, but three times as wide. Naturally born with two tiny feet, when taking small steps, he resembled a tree with large leaves swaying in a wind, very graceful.

This person's surname was Zhu, others called him Eunuch Zhu face to face, but behind his back, people referred to him as 'Zhu Little Feet'.

Zhu Little Feet did not have a very good reputation. He raised two 'adopted sons' outside the palace. They always plastered themselves in face powder and makeup, no one knew what for.

Due to Great Liang having expanded their sea route early, the common people's customs were not as close-minded as the previous dynasties. There were many shameful secrets and unspeakable matters hidden inside every official and nobility, hence the matter of Zhu Little Feet should be nothing if this eunuch did not condone his sons of taking advantage of his rank and name for their personal gains.

Zhu Little Feet came in front of Gu Yun and smiled. "The Marquis and Your Highness had arrived already? His Majesty is having a conversation with Master Liao Chi of Hu Guo temple. They have instructed that if you both are here, you can go straight in, Head Monk Liao Chi said that it's been so long since he had last seen you - oh, just in time, the masters are coming out!"

During the conversation, two monks came out from inside.

Gu Yun knew the one leading in front, the man had a wrinkled up face, full of sorrow, as if he had never eaten a full meal in his life. It was the Head Monk of the Hu Guo Temple.

Gu Yun's gaze couldn't help but fall on the man behind him. It's

also a monk about twenty or thirty years old, dressed in a snow-white robe. His face was as beautiful as a painting. Stepping on the small trail of the palace in his clean and neat shoes, he appeared like a divine being walking on snow to arrive.

Even though Gu Yun hated the bald heads, at that moment, he still couldn't help but be reminded of the legend of the monk* who have traveled to Tianzhu from the past dynasty.

**a reference to the monk San Zhang in the work 'Journey to the West' who had traveled to Tianzhu to obtain Buddha's books of teaching for his countrymen.*

As if the young monk could sense something, he looked up to meet Gu Yun's gaze. His eyes were clear, and there seemed to be a sea of serene stars inside that could make people sink into them with just one glance.

The young monk clasped his hands together, greeting Gu Yun from far away.

Gu Yun seemed to have broken out of a dream and averted his sight, he thought, *"What am I staring at a bald head for?"*

He did not pay any attention to the other, looked away rudely and asked Zhu Little Feet: "Who is the little white face with the bald donkey?"

Zhu Little Feet had watched Gu Yun grow up since he was a child and had understood his personality, he quickly replied: "That is the Head Monk's younger brother, master Liao Ran, who had just returned from traveling overseas."

Gu Yun thought: *"What kind of crappy name is this, I feel unlucky just by hearing it."*

Who would have thought that the more he wished to avoid the others, the more they insisted on coming over to greet him face to face.

Chapter 25: Ready to Depart

—

"... Marshal, you really have such big guts!"

—

Head Monk Liao Chi led his overly beautiful younger brother over, clasped his hands together to greet Gu Yun, then smiled brightly: "I haven't seen you for many years, the Marquis still appears as graceful as ever, it truly is a blessing for us Great Liang people."

Gu Yun was suffocated by the old man's hideous face, he thought inside, *"Isn't it? Haven't been cursed to death by you yet."*

Of course, as the Marquis of Order, he couldn't be as unreasonable as to pick a fight just depending on his emotions, at least on the surface, he must remain vigilant. He only casually nodded: "All thanks to the blessing of the Master."

The white-faced monk also bowed down to pay respect, but he hadn't said a word, only smiling gently, Gu Yun couldn't help but glance at him.

Liao Chi explained: "The Marquis please don't blame him, although my younger brother has an excellent understanding of Buddha's teaching, but unfortunately he is born to follow the path of silent meditation."

Gu Yun was surprised, unexpectedly, this Liao Ran person was mute.

The monk stepped forward and extended his hands towards Gu Yun. His face was very white, making his eyebrows appear even blacker like a piece of wood on the snow. If he wasn't a monk, he would have long black hair, together with a pair of red lips and white teeth, he was similar to a bewitching deity made out of white

porcelain.

Gu Yun frowned slightly, thinking: *"What is he doing, does he want to enlighten me?"*

Head Monk Liao Chi explained: "The Marquis carries the peace and stability of all Great Liang on your shoulder, I assume that you will soon have to depart to the frontier in a few days. My younger brother wishes to pray for your safety."

Gu Yun made a faint smile: "There is no need to bother the master, that is not necessary - I have never read the teachings before, and I have never offered an incense either, I will not bother the Buddha."

Liao Chi: "Amitabha, Buddhist doctrine is boundless, enlightening all beings, these words of the Marquis are mistaken."

As Gu Yun heard the words 'Amitabha', he was already struck with the urge to beat someone, his patience had reached its limit, no longer wanting to talk to them, he coldly replied: "His Majesty is still waiting, I dare not delay anymore, I will pay a visit another day, pardon me for not being able to accompany you."

After he finished, he pulled Chang Geng along to follow Zhu Little Feet's lead inside the palace. Chang Geng inadvertently looked back and saw that the monk was not at all affected by Gu Yun's attitude, he remained as devout and sincere as when kneeling in front of Buddha. His mouth continued to make silent words as if sending his prayer and fortune towards Gu Yun who was gradually walking further away, regardless if Gu Yun himself wanted them or not.

Chang Geng was in a daze when he was suddenly pulled by a hand. Gu Yun spoke in a hushed tone mixed with irritation, "What's so good about looking at monks, looking too long will cause dizziness."

Chang Geng was well behaved and retracted his gaze, he asked Gu Yun: "Yifu, that master said soon you will have to leave the capital, is it true?"

Gu Yun: "Mm."

Chang Geng asked: "When?"

"It is not yet decided," Gu Yun replied. "I still have to assess the emperor's opinion - if I am gone, you are the biggest one in the manor, you have the final say, if there is anything you don't understand, you can discuss it with Uncle Wang."

Gu Yun did not need to remind Chang Geng to focus on his studies or be diligent with martial arts practice and other things because, in this respect, Chang Geng was already diligent enough to make an elder like Gu Yun feel ashamed.

Chang Geng was dumbfounded as he heard this, after a while, he asked with distress: "Is yifu not going to bring me along?"

"Ah?" Gu Yun did not understand. "What am I bringing you along for?"

Chang Geng footsteps came to a halt.

Before this day, Chang Geng never considered this situation.

From Yanhui to the capital, they have always been together, Chang Geng did not realize that once his little yifu led his troops back to the northwest again, they would be separated from each other by half of Central Plains.

In the blink of an eye, Chang Geng's heart was plunged into a spiral of thoughts - in the eyes of his yifu, he was only just a child who wasn't well-versed in either literary or martial arts. The soldiers going to the frontier are equipped with armors and weapons, who would bring a family member as a burden along with them?

In the future when Gu Yun would go to the Northwestern Frontier, if it was safe on that side, he may still be able to return to the capital to report once a year. But if the situation was unstable, who knew how long he would have to be stationed there. Now, he was officially fourteen years old, how many years did he have left before his coming of age ceremony?

At that time, he would have to leave the shelter and protection of the Marquis of Order and move out of the manor alone. He will bear with him a false identity, living in this vast and lonesome capital...

Yifu would soon have to marry a wife and have children, and when that time comes, would he still remember this small burden that he used to raise like livestock in the manor?

They referred to each other as father and son, but their fate was like that of a broken lamp, burned away immediately in the blink of an eye, only he was still remaining immersed in this delusional dream.

As his thoughts reached this point, the entire palace seemed to have become a big ice cavern, freezing him inside.

When Gu Yun saw that Chang Geng suddenly stopped his feet, he turned back and looked at him with confusion.

In a panic, Chang Geng involuntarily blurted out: "I want to go to the frontier with you! I can enlist in the army!

Gu Yun thought to himself: *Don't cause trouble, it already takes so much effort to dig you up and bring you out of the door for a walk, what is this talk about joining military ranks?*

However, after a half-year of 'on-hand experience', he generally already discovered a trick to act as an elder. He did not directly disgrace Chang Geng face to face, only smiled with an over-the-top, seemingly exaggerated encouragement: "Very well, be my soldier in the future alright, little Prince?

Chang Geng: "..."

Of course, what Gu Yun discovered was a trick to deal with a four-year-old child, he was ten years off the mark.

Chang Geng's affection and desperation were lightly swept back to him by the other man as if they were not worth anything.

The young boy then quietly closed his mouth, no longer doing

unnecessary struggles. He stared at Gu Yun's broad back as if staring at a narrow door that he could never reach for the rest of his life.

Long An Emperor Li Feng was the brother of Chang Geng in name, but from their appearances alone, one could not see that they share a blood-related relationship, His Majesty looked more like the Former Emperor.

This was only the second time that Chang Geng met him. Compared with the frantic situation from last time, he could see the man a lot more clearly now. The new emperor just reached the age of thirty - this period was said to be the most beautiful one in a man's life. His face was pleasant looking and appeared extremely refined and educated. Even if he was not the emperor, just judging from his appearance alone, one could already tell that he was meant to be successful in life.

Chang Geng was very keen, especially after arriving at the capital, he became even sharper at reading others facial expressions and speeches. Gu Yun seldom ever mentioned anything, but Teacher Shen wasn't so mindful about this subject. Shen Yi harbored quite a lot of dissatisfaction towards the Emperor and often complained in private. Hence it was easy for one to link His Majesty with the image of someone who was mean-spirited and small-hearted.

But in actuality, it was not at all like what one might imagine.

Gu Yun hasn't even set foot inside yet but Emperor Long An has already ordered a servant to bring out the brazier: "I have told them earlier, Uncle would come early. Hurry, come on in to warm up, I feel cold just by looking at you."

Emperor Long An called him 'uncle', but in reality, this was quite right for Gu Yun did not bear the surname Li after all. In the past, with love and affection, the former Emperor casually assigned this role, but the current Emperor still kept this intimate habit from his childhood years.

In front of Gu Yun, he did not use the pronoun 'zhan'* or display

his status, there was an enthusiastic intimacy in his manner, not at all similar to how a ruler would treat his subject, but instead a lot more like how one would treat their family member.

**zhan is the pronounce all Emperors used for themselves instead of saying 'I / me'*

"Xiao Chang Geng also came here," Li Feng looked at Chang Geng and sighed. "Young ones sure change so much day by day, the boy was still not this tall the last time I saw him - I just inherited the throne, always worrying and always having both my hands full these few months, hence why I couldn't pay more attention to you. Come closer, let big brother take a good look at you."

Chang Geng had already prepared to be 'disliked' - but the emperor's 'dislike' was so well hidden to the point where he could not sense it at all.

This imperial city, be it gratitude or enmity, they were all carefully hidden. At first glance, everyone appeared to be happy and pleasant.

Gu Yun and the Emperor casually chatted, and once in a while, they would reminisce about their childhood days. Afterwards, Emperor Long An brought out the 'red packet money' he had prepared for Chang Geng.

Chang Geng, a child who grew up in Yanhui town, had never experienced the world. He only knew that 'no work, no reward'. As he listened to Zhu Little Feet listing out all of his gifts one by one, he almost felt uneasy, suspicious that the reason Gu Yun picked him up early in the morning to come into the palace was simply to find the Emperor to collect the goods!

Emperor Long An happily asked about the progress of Chang Geng's martial arts practice and reading. He said: "You are the descendant of us, Li family. You should be diligent, grow to be a talented individual with strong will, and help share some workloads with brother. What does Chang Geng want to do in the future?"

Chang Geng looked at Gu Yun and said: "I am willing to become

a soldier under the Marshal in the future, serve him by his side, and help open up the territory for Your Majesty."

Emperor Long An laughed, appeared to be very pleased, constantly praising Chang Geng for having ambition.

Gu Yun took a teacup on the table and had a sip. He didn't interject and, just laughed, his eyes became thin lines from laughter, very warming.

"Who is serving who?" He thought helplessly.

Though helpless, he couldn't help but feel that these words were incredibly comfortable, flowing from his ears to his heart. Even the bad luck from having encountered the monks just now was thoroughly swept away.

Emperor Long An jokingly said: "This is the plan, but the soldiers in the frontiers must endure very harsh living conditions. How can your yifu be willing to let you go out there to suffer?"

Gu Yun knew that the emperor was using this roundabout way to warn him, keenly aware of the situation, he smartly responded: "If your subject dared to bring the little prince to the battlefield, as an older brother, Your Majesty will be the first one to reprimand me."

Emperor Long An was satisfied with this reply, he beckoned Zhu Little Feet over: "The messenger of the Western Pope gifted us a big clock last time, its size is even bigger than the rockery in the Imperial Garden, almost resembling a small building, and every half an hour, there are puppets coming out to do performance of songs and dances, very lively. You bring Chang Geng to go see it, I want to chat with Uncle for a while."

Chang Geng knew that they have important business to discuss, he immediately followed Zhu Little Feet outside.

Zhu Little Feet was very diligent in treating this incredibly well-mannered Fourth Prince and led him towards the pavilion.

The 'warm pavilion' was a semi-enclosed garden with colorful glazed tiles on the outside. The airy places were equipped with steam

braziers. Inside, it was spring all throughout the year, with countless flowers blooming.

The grandfather clock Emperor Long An spoke of was placed in the middle with a Western picture-viewing device, the scenery before him resembling a mountainous landscape.

Chang Geng felt very impressed by the exquisite craftsmanship of foreigners, but like most of Central Plains people, he could not appreciate the too bright colors of the pictures in the device. After the momentary amazement, he soon lost interest. His eyes fell on the corner of the pavilion. There were two people, one was the monk who they previously met on the way.

Liao Ran could not speak, he gently made a few gestures with his hands. The little abbot beside him immediately came forward to greet: "His Highness, Eunuch Zhu, thanks to His Majesty's grace, uncle and I were able to stay in the Royal Garden for sightseeing, we met with *Wei Wang* on the way. Master had has gone to speak with *Wei Wang*. We are now waiting for him here. I hope that we haven't disturbed His Royal Highness."

Chang Geng replied with courtesy: "I'm the one that troubled the master."

After doing a few more gestures, he had a kind of aura of no matter what he does, it would be smooth and natural, and not at all making people feel awkward while facing with the mute monk, the little abbot explained next: "Uncle said that he felt fate when he first saw Your Highness. In the future, if you have some time, please come to Hu Guo Temple, he will surely serve you with the best kind of tea."

Chang Geng said: "Why yes, of course ."

Liao Ran reached out his hand to Chang Geng, as Chang Geng did not understand, he hesitated before reaching his hand over.

The monk then wrote in his palm: *"Does Your Highness believe in Buddha?"*

Chang Geng did not hate monks like Gu Yun, the quiet and

peaceful aura of these monks created a very good impression for him at first sight.

But he also had no faith, because without concept, if you don't understand something, you could not say whether you believe in it or not.

But Chang Geng did not want to cause Liao Ran to lose face here, he only casually smiled.

Immediately, Liao Ran understood. He was not at all angry. Instead, he showed a little smile, then wrote in Chang Geng's palm: "*Without knowing suffering, one would not believe in Buddha.*"

Chang Geng was completely startled, the young adolescent looked into the eyes of the mute monk that seemed to cover everything in this world inside them, suddenly feeling that the long depression in his heart was seen through by the other party. In that moment, the Bone of Impurity, Xiu Niang, his incomprehensible origin, and his difficulty to speak of improper thoughts - all of them slid through his heart like water, they were pierced by the words 'without knowing suffering, one would not believe in Buddha'.

Liao Ran put his hands together to pay respect, about to be on his way.

Chang Geng suddenly stopped him: "Master, I will come to Hu Guo Temple in the future."

Liao Ran smiled, then casually led the little abbot with him away.

Just now, the sound of the big clock in the pavilion was heard, the light music sounded out in the air. Chang Geng turned back around and saw the twelve small doors of the clock open. Twelve small puppets came out, one with a harp, one was dancing, and there was one singing a high-pitched song. After finishing their joyful and lively song, they bowed down then retreated back inside.

All the liveliness settled.

After this day, Gu Yun lived a life of waking up earlier and returning even later. Emperor Long An wished to send him to represent Great Liang and sign a trade treaty with the Western Pope's messenger. The Western Region border now opened a market, and if things went smoothly as planned, they would extend it to a larger scale.

As this situation was required, he would have to prepare for departure immediately. Gu Yun ran a few round-trips from the capital to the northern camp. Before he left, he still needed to take care of the matter with the ministry of revenue and kept an eye on the amount of Ziliujin distribution in the army. He was busy from day until night.

On the 16th day of the first month of the lunar calendar, Gu Yun and Shen Yi returned late as usual, and they had already decided to leave the following day. Still have some things to discuss, they went back to the Marquis's manor together.

Shen Yi: "How did the emperor hand over Jia Lai for us to escort? Was he not afraid that we will secretly slaughter that barbarian in the middle of the road?"

Gu Yun smiled sadly and said: "The emperor dismissed my request to increase the distribution of Ziliujin this year. It is said that Ling Shu Institute has gotten their hands on a new puppet design from the Western foreigners, it can be used to do planting work in place of people, quite amazing. This year, they plan to promote this product in Jiangnan first. Ziliujin also has a new place to be distributed to. What else can I say? Why would the Black Iron Camp try to compete with the people?

"The Emperor said that the Black Iron Camp is the weapon of the country. They can lack anyone but cannot lack us, we will get a part of the old man's tribute as well. Do you think I would still dare to touch that barbarian?"

The meaning of Emperor Long An was made very clear - *If Prince*

Jia Lai lost even a hair, the iron monsters of the Black Iron Camp no longer need to burn Ziliujin, Gu Yun, you can go push them yourself.

Shen Yi pondered about it and found that there was nothing he could say, he could only laugh in frustration.

The two men passed by the puppets guarding the entrance of the manor. Shen Yi asked: "That's right, about your departure from the capital tomorrow, have you told His Highness yet?"

Gu Yun rubbed his nose.

Shen Yi: "What?"

Gu Yun lowered his voice and spoke in his ears: "I told him that I will accompany His Majesty to Xiangshan, and will not be able to come back tomorrow night. If you see him later, remember not to ruin it for me."

Shen Yi was silent for a moment, then said: "... Marshal, you really have such big guts!"

Gu Yun was also distressed. Since he had inadvertently revealed that he may have to return to the frontier, Chang Geng became completely different. Previously he had always been diligent with martial arts practice, but now he started to risk his life for it. He had injured his wrist the other day, it became swollen like a steam bun. In the afternoon, he insisted on going out for archery regardless of his wound, making his martial arts instructor so frightened that day by day he had to come find Gu Yun to apologize.

Gu Yun felt that Chang Geng was a bit too clingy to him. Were the father and son of other families also this nauseous?

This cotton coat* was too warm, making him break out in sweat - it truly was a comfortable and sweet burden to bear.

**people often used the term cotton coat to compared to their daughters, warm and caring for their parents.*

The two walked into the manor side by side, and when they entered the door, they found that the inside was still brightly lit and

no one had gone to bed yet.

A little girl as beautiful as a flower rushed out from the inside and shouted: "Big brother, the Marquis is back!"

Gu Yun thought: *"Since when was there a girl in the manor, is it that the big willow tree at the door coming to life?"*

Looking at it again, the 'little girl' was actually Cao Niangzi. He had dressed himself up like a little lady, or rather a little lady who was ready to celebrate the New Year.

Gu Yun was puzzled: "What are you all doing?"

"Big brother Chang Geng said that today is the Marquis's birthday, he had told everyone to wait for you to come back." Cao Niangzi said, "General Shen has also come, just in time, we can all eat noodles together."

Shen Yi immediately agreed: "Very well, it's better to arrive on time than to arrive early!"

After that, he gave Gu Yun a meaningful look and subtly conveyed his meaning with his eyes - *you liar, are you feeling guilty yet?*

—

Happy birthday yifu!!!

Chapter 26: Seeking Buddha

T/N: VERY PAINFUL

—

"If one's heart is small, all their sufferings even as large as a house, can only be cramped into that small corner. But if one's heart was as vast as heaven and earth, then even if their troubles were as large as a mountain, they would become nothing more than a droplet of water in the endless sea."

—

The birthdays of older people were lively, for they were the celebration of longevity. The birthdays of children were also lively for it was not easy for them to have grown a year older, their parents could heave a sigh of relief.

Gu Yun was neither old nor young, with no affection from any family relative near and far. If he was at home, the old butler would still remember to prepare something for him, but for the most part, he was always absent from home. Even he himself would forget the 16th day of the first month due to work.

To be honest, there was nothing to celebrate. The common folk paid attention to the saying 'girls born on the first, meant to be Her Majesty; boys born on the full moon, meant to be an official' - It was favorable for girls to be born on the first day of the lunar month, and the 15th of lunar month for boys. He could have been born in the rich and fortunate night, yet he had to be delayed by a few hours in his mother's womb; it was clear to see that this was a naturally born bad luck.

Cao Niangzi not only dressed himself up but also joined Chang Geng and the others to drag out the sword training puppet to mess with.

The children painted two simple blushes for it, and no one knew

where they were able to obtain a few old silks to tie around the iron arms.

The sword training puppet decorated in bright lights and flowers carried a bowl of noodles in its hand, dumbly staring at Gu Yun. Its black iron face seemed to have an incomprehensible and unspeakable grievance.

Gu Yun scolded: "Bastards, is the sword training puppet for you all to play like this?"

Ge Ban Xiao came forward to announce his contribution: "Marquis sir, the fake girl applied the blushes, I helped make the fire for cooking the noodle, and big brother put in the egg!"

Gu Yun was dumbfounded for a moment as the manor was immersed in a lively aura, making the place that had been lonesome for many years suddenly become unrecognizable.

Chang Geng: "Yifu, eat the noodle first before entering the door."

Gu Yun: "Alright."

He picked up the bowl and glanced at Chang Geng. He especially picked out the egg to eat first. His first bite was into a crisp fragment of eggshell, but he did not even once complain. He continued to chew and swallow them altogether. And as if he had never eaten a meal for eight lifetimes, the whole bowl was finished in a moment, even the broth was all clean.

Since ancient times, 'a tender hometown was the burial mound of all heroes'. In Gu Yun's previous departure from the capital, there was neither burden or worry. Only this time, his heart was full of sorrow.

Perhaps because for him, it has always been 'returning' to the frontier. Only this time, he would soon have to 'leave home'.

Unfortunately, not only this gentleness, but even if his inside was cut into pieces, nothing could stop the feet of the Marquis of Order.

The next day, Gu Yun prepared to leave as if nothing was wrong. In the end, he did not bid farewell to Chang Geng but traveled to the Northern Camp alone. He turned to look back at the direction of the capital.

It was a pity that from such a distance, he could only vaguely see Qi Yuan tower.

Shen Yi walked his horse to Gu Yun's side and asked: "Grand Marshal, is your conscience speaking out?"

Gu Yun sighed: "Perhaps he will not recognize me anymore the next time I return... This yifu title of mine is always so faltering... Let's go."

The Black Iron Camp set out on their march in a strict manner, resembling a black whirlwind sweeping by. Everyone could not help but move out to make way for them.

They were tasked with escorting the Barbarian Prince to the north, then with marching straight to the west to eliminate the bandits rampaging on the desert of the Western Region, to ensure that the Silk Road could be operated in a safe and smooth manner.

The day after they left, Chang Geng got up early as any other day. He remembered that Gu Yun was not at home, yet he still couldn't help but taking the puppet to Gu Yun's empty yard, cross swords with it, then have his breakfast all by himself.

When he was about to leave, he looked up and saw that the plum blossoms in the courtyard had bloomed.

Just a few days ago, there was a big snow, the petals were covered with a layer of condensed frost. The more he looked, the more he grew to like it, the more he couldn't help but reach up and pick out two branches. His first reaction was always to save them for Gu Yun, even though he knew yifu will not necessarily return within three or five days. He carefully wiped away the frost and snow off the branches, then looked for a flower vase to place into Gu Yun's room.

However, even after looking all over Gu Yun's large chamber,

Chang Geng wasn't able to find anything that could serve as a vase, not even a wine bottle. He opened the window to ask their old butler: "Uncle Wang, do we have a vase at home?"

The old butler responded then walked off to get one, Chang Geng held two plum blossom branches in hands, idly looking back and forth Gu Yun's room.

Suddenly, his eyes fell on the bedside, he froze - the fox fur coat on the bed that gives the whole bedroom a more valuable look had disappeared.

At this time, Uncle Wang came in with a blue vase made from porcelain and smiled at Chang Geng: "Your Highness, will this do? Where should we put it"

Chang Geng's eyes stared straight at the empty bed, he asked in a daze: "Uncle Wang, why did the Marquis put away the fur coat this early?"

Uncle Wang's eyes twitched slightly, he let out a stiff replied: "Was the Marquis not escorting His Majesty? Perhaps he had brought it with him. "

Chang Geng's heart slowly sank.

On New Year's Eve, the Black Eagle soldier serving under Gu Yun had told him that Marshal never wore winter clothes in the capital, and would only put them on occasionally in the face of a snow blizzard.

He had already felt that it was a bit strange on that day - since Gu Yun did not wear winter clothes, for what reason did he hang the fur coat out for? What was it going to be used for? But at that time, the situation was in a state of chaos, he himself was also engulfed in nightmares, his mind was not so clear thus he did not think about it any further.

Chang Geng turned his head, his voice dried up, like a string that had been stretch to its limit: "Uncle Wang, in the end, where did he go? Please don't lie to me just because I don't like going outside

much, even I know that Xiangshan is still nearer to the capital compared to the Northern camp."

Uncle Wang held a vase in his hands, standing still awkwardly.

Gu Yun had left it to others to do his bidding for him when he left. The old butler had expected that such a thing like this would happen sooner or later, but he did not expect for it to come so fast.

Chang Geng took a deep breath and whispered, "Is he already leaving the capital to go to the frontier? Where? North, or West?"

The old butler forced out an awkward smile: "As for military affairs, this old servant does not understand much... Your Highness, perhaps the Marquis did this for he did not want you to be worried..."

Chang Geng's hand twisted, breaking one of the flower branches in half. He forced out every word: "He is not afraid that I will be worried, he is afraid that I will insist on coming with him no matter what."

The old butler closed his mouth.

Chang Geng was the adopted son of Gu Yun in name, although no one welcomed him or cared for him, he still bore the surname Li after all. In the future, he will inherit the status of a Jun Wang. The old butler was in distress, feeling that his master had retreated in the face of the enemy, throwing this hot potato back for him. Uncle Wang had fully prepared himself to be slashed on by the boy's wrath.

But after waiting for a long time, Chang Geng did not say a word.

Chang Geng's loud screams and sorrowful shouts were all hidden in his heart.

It's not just about Gu Yun's sudden refusal to bid goodbye to him. He had been lied to more than once, he should had long been used to it, he should be facing this situation with calmness.

But this time, the concern and anxiety that had been accumulating in his heart since moving to the capital finally could no

longer be contained inside, they could not help but come bursting out like water out of the floodgate.

Chang Geng's heart was as clear as a mirror, he had always been aware that his existence was unnecessary. He did not intend to get involved. It was destined for him to be an insignificant chess piece, like in the dark river of Yanhui Town, being dragged away involuntarily.

He was blindfolded by the false sense of peace and happiness these few days, greed had risen up inside him, he wanted to grab hold of something, deceived himself, and refused to think about the future.

What more do you wish for? Chang Geng placed a hand on his chest and asked himself. *You want too much.*

However, despite the waves of turbulence in his heart, when faced with the old grey haired butler, Chang Geng did not say anything.

The old butler worriedly asked: "Your Royal Highness?..."

Chang Geng silently took the vase from his hands and carefully trimmed the flower branch that he had broken off. After placing the flowers inside and setting it on Gu Yun's desk, he whispered: "I have troubled you."

As he finished, he immediately turned to leave.

Exiting Gu Yun's room, he could not help but switch from walking to running, even the sword training puppet was left behind.

Ge Ban Xiao held a small box of Ziliujin no one knew taken out from where, on his way, he almost bumped into Chang Geng, he called out: "Oh, big brother..."

Chang Geng acted like he did not hear it, like a gust of wind passing by, he rushed into his own room then turned to locked the door.

This was also the part of Chang Geng that Gu Yun liked the most,

even with greater wrath, he will never vent them on unrelated people. In this respect, Xiu Niang's contribution could not be denied. Her long and constant abuse throughout more than ten years had trained Chang Geng to have an incredible endurance.

At the same time, the Bone of Impurity buried deep in the youth's body was like vegetation that needed to be fed with poisonous water, and gradually bloomed into a ferocious flower.

Chang Geng began to feel difficulty in breathing, his chest seemed to be crushed by layers of boulders, the muscles of his body stiffened into a rust of iron, his legs involuntarily twitched.

His ears were ringing, he was horrified to find a strange dominating and tyrannical sensation rushing out of his chest. He involuntarily balled his fingers into a fist, the joints cracking loudly. For the first time, he experienced what it felt like to have 'sleep paralysis' while wide awake.

Chang Geng clearly felt that there was an invisible hand cruelly erasing all the warm feelings and affection in his heart.

At the beginning, Chang Geng was still clear-minded, he thought with fear: "*Is this the Bone of Impurity? What happened to me*?"

Soon, even the horror was evaporated, his consciousness soon become blurred. He began to wonder where he was. Countless thoughts in his head rising up and down similar to seawater, and a murderous intent was born from nowhere.

On one hand, he thought that Gu Yun had already left - he was no longer wanted or needed, on the other, he seemed to see Gu Yun standing in front of him, the other man's expressionless face mocking his incompetence and powerlessness.

All the negative emotions in Chang Geng's heart were magnified by hundreds and thousands of times by the Bone of Impurity.

At this moment, it seemed as if Gu Yun was no longer the little yifu whom he cherished in his heart, but a mortal enemy that he despised with all his being, whom he was eager to grasp in his hands

to humiliate.

Chang Geng squeezed the ruined blade hanging in front of his chest, the edges of the blade although had been smoothed out, still cut into his fingers, deep enough to draw blood.

The vivid sensation of pain piercing through the seemingly infinite numbness had awakened Chang Geng, he instinctively found a way out, ten fingers firmly grabbed onto his skin, the wounds leaving behind a mess of flesh and blood on his arms.

When the attack of Bone of Impurity gradually subsided, the sun had begun to come down.

Chang Geng's clothes were soaked through with cold sweat, his hands and arms were covered in blood, and he was leaning against the door in exhaustion. He had finally learned the power of Bone of Impurity, only to realize that he was too innocent in thinking that Bone of Impurity could only cause nightmares.

This time, Xiu Niang truly did not go easy on him.

The old butler and the other people did not see him come out in a long time, there was no answer even when they knocked on his door. They have been worried for long, walking around in front of his room and tried to call for him again and again after a few moments.

The sense of people had made Chang Geng feel better. His eyelids twitched slightly. A drop of cold sweat rolled down his forehead and fell to his eyelashes, heavy, he almost couldn't open his eyes: "I am fine, let me be alone for a while."

"You haven't eaten all day," said the old butler. "If the Marquis is here, he wouldn't be able to bear to look at Your Highness mistreating yourself like this - even just a bowl of porridge is good enough, let this old servant go fetch one for you?"

Chang Geng was exhausted both mentally and physically, at the mention of Gu Yun, he silently recited the other man's name a few

times in his heart, tried his best to get himself together: "It's alright Uncle Wang, if I am hungry, I will go find something to eat later in the night."

The old butler listened to his voice, although it was weak, it was still reasonable. It was not his place to continue to press on. He had to turn back and called the other servants, together with Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi who were watching over with concern. They all turned around to look at Chang Geng's door a few times as they took their leave.

Chang Geng sat by the door. As soon as he looked up, he saw the pair of shoulder guards that Gu Yun hung on his bed.

The object was dark and cold, giving off a sense of inhumanity, but it was left here by the original owner in order to dispel his nightmares.

He did not know how long he had sat there, the brazier in the room gradually warmed his cold body. Chang Geng regained a little bit of strength, he climbed up to clean up after himself. He changed into new clothes and found the medicine that his martial arts instructor had given him when he injured himself in a sword training session the other day. He washed the wounds then carefully applied it.

He took Gu Yun's shoulder guards down, hugged it in his arms, and laid down face up on his bed.

He did not cry.

It might be because there was no strength left, or it might be because he had just shed blood.

Quite often as one already chose the road of shedding blood, they will not shed tears anymore. After all, a person could only have one little bit of water, there could only be one side to focus on.

Chang Geng clashed with the enemy that was destined to entangle with him for a lifetime - utterly defeated, and also came to recognize the power of the opponent.

But it was strange how he felt no fear, much like in the town of Yanhui, when he was alone in Xiu Niang's room, facing the barbarian in Heavy Armor.

He had a kind and gentle attitude, but nothing in this world could ever force him to give in.

Ah... anything except Gu Yun.

Chang Geng thought with exhaustion: *"I hate Gu Yun to death."*

Then he tried Gu Yun's shoulder guards on himself. He had never worn armor before, he didn't know whether it can fit, he only felt that this thing pressing on his body was a lot heavier than he imagined. He fell asleep with it on; there were still countless layers of nightmares waiting for him ahead.

The next day, Chang Geng announced that he would like to go out for a while.

The entire manor was shocked. The scene of His Highness being carried out the door by Marshal Gu on New Year's Eve was still vivid in front of their eyes.

Gu Yun's original words were: "Delay him for three or five days. At that time, we have already passed the seven major gates to the Northern Frontier. He won't be able to chase after and will have to behave."

But it hadn't been three or five days yet. The old butler was afraid that Chang Geng was preparing his horse to follow them, he quickly said: "His Royal Highness, the Black Iron Camp is no ordinary army, they move very fast, even a greater steed cannot catch up. Moreover, they do not allow individuals without being in military rank to stay, this was the rule that the previous Marquis had passed down..."

Chang Geng calmly replied: "Uncle Wang, I didn't intend to chase after them to cause trouble, I am not a child who doesn't understand

common sense."

Old butler: "Then you are..."

Chang Geng: "I want to go to Hu Guo Temple to visit Master Liao Ran. I have already promised him the other day."

The old butler's face once again became unfathomable.

When Marshal would come home in the future and found that while he was away, His Highness had committed treason, betraying his own side to run to Hu Guo temple...

The old butler truly could not imagine the look on Gu Yun's face - this was no different than being cheated on.

However, the most urgent task at the moment was to cheer the Marquis' son up. The old butler had no other choice but to bite his teeth and arrange a row of guards to escort Chang Geng to Hu Guo Temple.

As mighty as coming to pick a fight.

Liao Ran had prepared tea. When he saw Chang Geng, he was not surprised, seeming like he had predicted that he would come. He invited Chang Geng to sit down and poured a cup of tea for him. He also asked the little abbot to bring them a brazier, pen, and papers for himself - as if he intended to have a long discussion with Chang Geng.

It was only half a month since Liao Ran last saw him, but he found that the confusion and anxiousness in the eyes of the young man in front of him had evaporated. He appeared firm and calm, along with a hint of sorrow, like a butterfly that had broken out of its shell.

Chang Geng said his thanks, took the cup of tea to take a sip, then almost spat it back out.

The monk said last time that he would serve him with the best tea, it seemed that his words were purely from politeness. He did not know what kind of tea the man had prepared for him, it was bitter

enough to numb his tongue, not a hint of tea could be found.

Chang Geng: "What is this?"

Liao Ran smiled and wrote: "*Ku Ding*, helps with blood circulation, improves eyesight and gives a better night sleep.*"

**Ku Ding tea is also called gualou tea, it is extremely bitter*

Chang Geng: "Isn't that gualou tea? I have drank it in the manor before, it seemed..."

It seemed not as disgusting as this.

Liao Ran: "*That was made with small leaves, this was large leaves.*"

Big leaves did sound somewhat amazing, Chang Geng was about to give a few words of praise when the monk wrote with sincerity: "*Big leaves are cheaper.*"

Chang Geng: "..."

He carefully looked at the monk's teacup. It was a high-quality cup and was very thoroughly cleaned. Unfortunately, as it had been used for too long, a few bumps are hard to avoid, the edge was chipped slightly.

Liao Ran: "*Your Highness please forgive the rundown condition of our temple.*"

The entire capital had left him with the impression of lavishness and grandiosity, as if everyone was wealthy. The city was packed with luxurious pastime activities, Westerners saying that the tiles on the street of Great Liang's capital were covered in gold was, in fact, not quite an exaggeration.

No one knew why, but all the people that Chang Geng knew were all poor.

No need to mention Shen Yi, he was naturally born with a bitter melon face of a poor farmer from generation to generation. Marshal

Gu as well, although he possessed a massive manor, it was only an empty shell. In the early morning of the first day of the new year, he could not wait to take Chang Geng to the palace to find the Emperor to collect the ransom. Now there was also Liao Ran who used a damaged teacup.

Chang Geng said: "The Hu Guo Temple has many incenses and offerings, engulfed in smoke, but Master here is at peace with a humble lifestyle. A true dedication to Buddha's practice."

Liao Ran smiled and wrote: "*This monk has traveled through North and South, I have quickly got used to it, my deepest apology for I have disrespected nobility.*"

Chang Geng asked: "I heard people say that the Master has also been to the Western countries by the Iron Dragon, is it to promote Buddha's teachings?"

Liao Ran: "*I am inexperienced and still have much to learn, I don't dare to follow the footsteps of other highly educated masters from ancient times. I only traveled to see the world, to see the people.*"

Chang Geng took another sip of Ku Ding, but the more he took in, the more bitter it became, not a hint of sweetness could be found. He swallowed it down in disappointment:

"I grew up in a small town far out in the border, I have never set foot outside of that small piece of land before. Even after arriving at the capital, I do not leave the manor either. Could it be that I am too content with what I have and lacked the will to strive forward?"

"But I feel that all joys or sorrows, anger or misery in this world are all the same in the end, even after watching other people, one still could not find their own destination."

Liao Ran: *"If one's heart is small, all their sufferings even as large as a house, can only be cramped into that small corner. But if one's heart was as vast as heaven and earth, then even if their troubles were as large as a mountain, they would become nothing more than a droplet of water in the endless sea."*

Chang Geng was stunned for a long while after reading his words, lifted his eyes to look at Master Liao Ran placing all the papers that had been filled with words inside the brazier, slowly burning them all.

"Master, you said to me on that day, 'without knowing suffering, one would not believe in Buddha'. Now that I have come to know the taste of suffering, I have come to listen to Buddha's teaching, may I request from you to show me the right path?"

Chapter 27: Run from home

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"Liao Ran, this bald donkey, best for him not to fall into my hands." Gu Yun said sullenly...

—

In the midst of everything, perhaps an unnamed god had reminded Marshal Gu, who was at the end of the horizon, that his son was about to be tricked into running away from home by a bald donkey. In short, after the Black Iron Camp had set out for one month, when writing his report back to the Emperor, Gu Yun actually remembered to write a home letter for Chang Geng.

The very familiar handwriting that Chang Geng had copied times before wrote down many pages. First, he confessed his mistakes earnestly, then using words that could reach the boy's heart, he explained reasonably and eloquently as for why he had left without bidding goodbye. Finally, he expressed his missing for Chang Geng straightforwardly and promised that if the northwest was safe, he would return to the manor before the end of the year for new year celebration.

Chang Geng read through it from start to finish, then put it aside with a smile, because even if he used his toe to think, he would still know that this letter wasn't coming from the hands of the Marquis of Order himself.

The sickeningly sweet words such as 'separated by thousands of miles, tossing and turning all night', 'eat more and dress warmly, don't let me be worried', were impossible to have sprouted from the soil of Gu Yun's head. He could tell from the lengthy words and sentences that they were written by Shen Yi in Gu Yun's stead.

At most, the bastard yifu only copied them down.

However, Chang Geng sadly came to realize that even though he was fully aware of this, when he imagined that these words really came out from the pen in Gu Yun's hand, he could not help but wanting to engrave every word into his eyes.

Unfortunately, Gu Yun did not keep his promise.

Gu Yun felt guilty. This time, he kicked out Shen Yi, who had made promises on his behalf, then personally took up arms, and wrote a very long letter to Chang Geng.

Chang Geng smiled in frustration after reading it, although he felt that this home letter was quite sincere, yet Gu Yun truly had no talent in coaxing others and have completely poured oil into the fire instead.

Marshal Gu first talked about a bunch of trivial matters that he thought was interesting and entertaining. He wrote a thousand words, off-topic for thousands of miles. Until the end, he used the words 'busy with military affairs' to sum up the reasons why he could not return to the capital.

Chang Geng did not care about how to properly grill scorpions in the desert for them to taste delicious. He had searched the long letters several times back and forth, but had never found the single sentence he cared about the most: if Gu Yun could not come back this year, then when could he come back?

However, there was nothing following after 'busy with military affairs', only a long list of gifts was attached.

Perhaps Gu Yun felt that apologizing in words was not enough, so he expressed it in action — he sent all the good stuff he was able to gather this year back to the manor, giving them all to Chang Geng, from jewelry, treasures to weapons, some with flaws and imperfections, so on and so forth.

On that same day, the 15-year-old Chang Geng locked himself in his room, and together with a Lou Lan dagger that Gu Yun gave him, endured another attack from the Bone of Impurity.

Afterwards, he made a decision - he did not want to live the life of someone that was cast aside. He did not want to follow the old teacher and the cautious instructor to only learn literary and martial arts on paper. He wanted to travel and see the world outside.

On the first day of the year, Chang Geng went to the palace with Zhu Little Feet to give the emperor a New Year's greeting, completing his duty.

Then he stayed at the manor until the 16th of the first month, told the kitchen to cook a bowl of longevity noodles, brought it to his chamber and finished it by himself, then quietly announced a decision that blew up the entire household.

Chang Geng: "I'm intending to live in Hu Guo Temple for a while."

He saw the old butler's pale green face and added: "Uncle Wang, rest assured, I don't want to be a monk, I just want to follow Master Liao Ran for a while, at the same time I can pray for yifu as well."

Old butler: "..."

What else could the old man say? He could only endure the chest pain and prepare the incense money, then asked the guards to send Chang Geng, Ge Ban Xiao, and Cao Niangzi to Hu Guo Temple.

The manor's old butler felt that perhaps this family had been cursed by an ancient witch. Once one entered the door, whether if it was a child born from this family or a child adopted from outside - they were all equally difficult to deal with. The old butler still remembered the frightening look on Gu Yun's face when he was a little child. He was similar to a young wolf that had been hurt, hating all the people around him regardless of reason and who it might be.

Although faced with many struggles and difficulty, that person was finally able to grow up and was now capable enough to carry the family.

Now there was another one who was even more unpredictable.

After Gu Yun left, Chang Geng started running to Hu Guo temple

every day.

There were plenty of others to spend time with, why must he love to spend time in a temple? His Highness the Fourth Prince Li Min seldom ever stepped out the door, but when he would, it was for an exceptional purpose.

The old butler was filled with countless concern, and every day he worried Chang Geng would shave his head.

But he knew that fifteen-year-old boys were the most unwilling when it comes to the persuasion of an elder, not to mention that Chang Geng was not his own. The old butler did not dare to interfere with his life too much, thus he went to convince Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi to be on his side.

When Cao Niangzi heard this, his eyes widened to the point of causing the eyeshadow on his lids to fall down, he said in anger: "What? The bald donkey wants to trick my big brother Chang Geng into becoming a monk?"

Men with good appearance were as rare as a phoenix's feather and a dragon's horn. Marshal Gu immediately left, not even his shadow could be seen now. He only had Chang Geng around him, and Chang Geng, even after hitting this age, there was still no signs of him becoming unsightly - this was already very hard to find, but now there was also the danger of him becoming a bald head. Immediately, Cao Niangzi became an ally of the old butler.

The next day, he deliberately put on men's clothing and insisted on coming with Chang Geng to see the holy scenery of Buddhism. When he left the door, he rolled up his sleeves and made a 'determined to succeed' gesture to a pair of puppets in front of the door.

The puppet was not human, it could only stare at his strange walking posture in a daze.

However, when he came back from Hu Guo Temple that night, Cao Niangzi never mentioned the matter of 'forcing the bewitching monk to reveal his true form', and since then, he had abandoned his

side to join the opposite team to go listen to Buddha's teaching every day. The reason could be no other than 'the bewitching monk was simply too handsome'.

Although Marshal was handsome as well, unfortunately, he was quite aggressive and could not sit quietly for others to appreciate. But Master Liao Ran was different, Cao Niangzi thought that he was simply a lotus strolling in this world, if placed in a pond, he could be immortalized for generations. Just taking one look at the man could make him happy for days.

The old butler could not figure out what spell the monk had given to the two boys and had to go find Ge Ban Xiao.

Ge Ban Xiao could not refuse a righteous cause, he followed along with them.

A few days later, Ge Ban Xiao also changed sides.

Because Master Liao Ran, aside from reading Buddha's scriptures, was also very proficient and knowledgeable about a vast variety of puppets and other Ziliujin-powered machines, Ge Ban Xiao even met people from Ling Shu Institute at his place.

The boy who longed to board the Giant Kite flying to the sky even in his dream directly knelt down under Buddha's feet without a second word.

Throughout this year, the old butler was actually used to Chang Geng running over to Hu Guo temple after a few days, he did not mind much at first.

Unexpectedly, His Highness took after bad traits instead of good. After arriving at Hu Guo Temple, he followed the example of Gu Yun and disappeared without saying goodbye.

He first instructed the guards, explained that he and Master Liao Ran would close the door to meditate in peace for a while, unrelated people must not disturb them. The guards, of course, did not dare to disturb and only stayed outside the door.

On the evening of the same day, Chang Geng took with him the

two traitors and followed Master Liao Ran to travel to Jiangnan.

After a few days, the guards recognized the abnormality and went to look for them, but only a single letter could be found in the Zen room.

The old butler wanted to cry. On one hand, he had sent someone to notify the Emperor while sending a letter to Gu Yun at the same time.

The Emperor was very generous upon hearing the news. First of all, he did not care much for this younger brother who fell out from nowhere. Secondly, as he believed in Buddhism, he also placed a blind trust in Master Liao Ran. As he heard that Chang Geng was following him to travel, he could not have but feel admiration, hated that he was tied down by common life and could not follow the master to enjoy his knowledge.

Gu Yun was far beyond reach right now and could not be counted on. There was news that the Western Region was infected with countless desert bandits, everyday Gu Yun chased after them to who knew where. Even when the messenger arrived at Xi Liang Gate, if they wanted to find Marshal Gu immediately, they could only have to rely on luck.

Although Liao Ran was a monk, he rarely discussed scriptures and never talked about Dharma or Buddhist poems that were difficult to understand. Most of the time, he talked about some common knowledge. As a monk, he didn't seem to practice his religion very well, he appeared to be too immersed in the mortal world. He would even go as far as making comments about the current politics, but would always burn all the writing after they finished talking.

After half a month, in a small tea shop in Jiangnan, three adolescents sat with a monk around a table.

Jiangnan's farming season had already begun, but looking at it, the fields did not have many people working. There were three old farmers with sun hats on watching the iron puppets that were working hard.

Compared with the intimidating puppets used for guarding the manor and for sword training, these peaceful farming puppets did not appear human, they were more similar to a small cart, running back and forth on the field while wearing a buffalo head carved from wood, looking very innocent.

This was the first batch of farming puppets sent out by the imperial court, having their first test run in Nanjing.

Back when Ge Ban Xiao still lived in Yanhui town, he had already harbored an extraordinary interest in Shen Yi's piles of broken copper and iron. His eyes shone bright as he watched the puppets.

Liao Ran tapped the table to pull the attention of Chang Geng and the others back to him. After a year, Chang Geng had been able to understand his sign language, the monk no longer had to write one word at a time.

"I have seen the farming puppets in the Western countries overseas, just one puppet can easily take care of one acre of land. Although it still requires to run on a small amount of Ziliujin, after several upgrade and improvements, coals are enough to support most of its working mechanism. The cost can be reduced by a large amount, it is said that one puppet is even more economical than a Chang Ming lamp."

Ge Ban Xiao: "That's a good thing, does it mean that from now on farmers will no longer need to wake up early and stay up late to work anymore?"

The puppets undergoing test run were assigned to Nanjing by the imperial court. The squires could register their names and bring one back, they were also responsible for the subsequent maintenance of the puppets. If the tenants wish to continue doing the planting themselves, they were free to do so, if not, they could give up the land they rented to the puppets. When the harvesting season arrives the coming year, the rent would be increased by 10% to compensate for the burning coals and the small amount of Ziliujin the puppets used.

In the first year, very few people did it, for they had to pay an increased amount of rent. But as the second year came, this plan becomes more and more widespread. People have come to recognize that this thing's working power was a lot greater than a human's. The rent was increased, but the amount of food they were able to keep for themselves were still a lot more compared to before, in addition, they no longer have to work in the early morning. Such a good thing as this, who wouldn't want to join in?

Thus this was the reason for the empty fields in Jiangnian, not a single farmer could be seen.

Liao Ran smiled and said nothing.

Chang Geng suddenly said: "I don't think this is a good thing. If the iron puppets can completely replace people, what else do people need to be used for? The land rented by the tenants also belonged to the local officials. In the first few years, these people may still agree to feed the idling farmers for old time's sake, but how many years can it last?"

Ge Ban Xiao was obsessed with all kinds of machines, seeing them even in dreams, he immediately said: "They can stay and become Mechanics!"

Cao Niangzi: "This one I know, even if you gather the steel armors of all Yanhui town's defensive forces together, only two Mechanics were enough to maintain them, they only come to find Teach - General Shen occasionally when they were simply too busy, they don't require that many Mechanics."

Ge Ban Xiao: "They can find something else to do, like..."

Like what, he wasn't able to come up with anything for a moment. Before, the living condition of his butcher family was not at all bad. In Ge Ban Xiao's eyes, there were other countless jobs to do aside to farming.

Cao Niangzi struggled to pull his gaze from Liao Ran's face and asked: "So if people can't find jobs, or a large number of people can't find jobs, will they rebel?"

Liao Ran looked down at him, Cao Niangzi's face flushed a deep red.

Liao Ran made a gesture: "They won't in these few recent years."

The three boys were silent for a while, Chang Geng asked: "Is it because of my yifu?"

Liao Ran smiled and looked at him.

"I remember on New Year's Eve that year, the tiger brought by the foreigners ran astray, the people on the street were in a state of chaos. It was only when they saw my yifu that they finally settled down."

Chang Geng paused and said, "I later heard people say, there was a sea of countless people near Qi Yuan tower. If it wasn't for yifu who had stabilized them, more people would have lost their lives just from pushing and shoving alone."

Liao Ran: "For taking Your Royal Highness out to travel like this, I have offended a great crime to the Marquis of Order. If this matter ever come to light in the future, I pray that under the blade of the Marquis, Your Highness would preserve this monk's puny life."

Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi both laughed, for they thought that he was only joking. After all, in their impression, Gu Yun was always cheerful and pleasant.

Liao Ran let out a bitter smile, skipping this topic, he signed: "The common folks told of a legend that the previous Marquis with an army of thirty people had successfully made the Northern Wolf bow their heads. It is said that the soldiers of the Black Iron Camp are godsent with incredible abilities, nothing can harm them. With the Black Iron Camp serving as a strong and sturdy beam, although there were groups of rebellion made from civilian mobs, it was difficult for them to grow into a larger scale."

Chang Geng sat up straight: "But I heard people say that if one wishes to demolish a house, the first thing to do is to break the beam."

Liao Ran looked at the young man in front of him, if Gu Yun came back, perhaps he would not recognize Chang Geng anymore. In just one year, he shot up a few inches high, and the hints of childishness on his face had all disappeared.

The boy who was anxious from just going out on New Year's Eve now sat in a small tea shop in the countryside of Jiangnan, chatting with the monk about the people's livelihood.

Liao Ran: "Your Royal Highness does not have to worry, The Marquis has long been fully aware of these matters."

Chang Geng remembered the calligraphy *"The World Cannot be Avoided"* in Gu Yun's room and was startled by the sudden waves of longing and missing breaking out of his heart. He sat quietly for a moment, letting all his longing freely raise up. He let out a sad smile, then picked up the teacup and finished it in one go.

Gu Yun, who was being missed greatly by Chang Geng, was still in the desert of the Western Regions. He had been confronted with the largest group of desert bandits in the local area for more than a month.

Xi Liang gate no longer appeared desolate like it was before. Since Great Liang and the Pope signed the treaty, the entire road of Xi Liang gate had become a treasure trove of wealth. Merchants and tourists quickly gathered together, the population of nearby towns had skyrocketed, the Westerners, the people from Central Plains, and people from other small neighboring countries of the Western Regions lived together.

Lou Lan, which was located at the entrance of the Silk Road, had become a place of trade. They quickly turned from a small country that had never been heard of before to a land of gold.

Lou Lan people were pleasant and happy, they lived and worked in peace, never causing any troubles. In the past, the Western Rebellion had nothing to do with them. Their relationship with Great Liang has always been very favorable. Hence, the Emperor had especially placed the entrance of the Silk Road here.

"Marshal, Xiao Jia's side has already taken the thief's nest, do we act now?"

Gu Yun: "What are you waiting for? Capture their leader, tonight we will go and get a free meal at Lou Lan's prince place!"

As he said this, he lightly pressed on his eyelids.

Shen Yi: "Did something happen to your eyes again..."

"No," Gu Yun complained, "My eyelids keep jumping, perhaps..."

He was not yet finished when a guard suddenly came forward and took out a letter: "Marshal!"

Gu Yun: "Oh, where is it from?"

Guard: "Home letter from the manor that was sent to Xi Liang gate. The family servant was unable to find you thus he transferred it to Lou Lan's people to deliver here."

Maybe it was a reply from Chang Geng.

Gu Yun thought as his hand opened it up, he had been looking forward to it greatly.

Then Shen Yi saw Gu Yun's expression slowly changed.

Shen Yi: "What's wrong?"

"Liao Ran, this bald donkey, best for him not to fall into my hands." Gu Yun said sullenly, walking back and forth in his camp with both hands behind his back, then kicked over the table: "Arrange me a few Black Eagles, Ji Ping, you will temporarily take care of things here for me."

Chapter 28: Jiangnan

T/N: look who have come back

Chang Geng thought that he could remain restrained, but he had once again overestimated himself - just as he did not expect Gu Yun to actually travel to Jiangnan to find him.

Shen Yi: "What?"

Gu Yun: "I am going to travel to Jiangnan."

Shen Yi shouted: "Ouch!... Ah, my jaw just dropped to my feet, it hurts - are you crazy? The Northwest commander of the defensive force is leaving his duty to travel to Jiangnan in secret, do you want to find death or to rebel!?"

Gu Yun calmly replied: "Today we have eliminated those desert bandits, for at least within three or five months, this place should be able to stay peaceful. With the speed of the Black Eagle, it will only take one or two days to arrive at Jiangnan, I will not delay for too long, after finding him I will return immediately."

Shen Yi already took in a deep breath, ready to give a lengthy and eloquent argument, but before any of it could come out, Gu Yun had hit his lower abdomen with his elbow.

Shen Yi cried out as he bent over: "I haven't said anything yet!"

Gu Yun: "Just preventing the problem before it could happen."

That night, thirteen Black Cavalry captured the bandit leader and his underlings who had been hiding away for a long time within the depths of the desert after many days of clashing against them. Gu Yun listened to the report and gave out a short order - "Imprison them". But he did not rest at all afterward but prepared to leave right away on the same night.

Lou Lan Prince Ban E Duo has already prepared the feast and the wines, waiting to give the Black Iron Camp a grand reception. But as he arrived, he only saw Gu Yun changing into a Black Eagle armor suit in irritation.

The country of Lou Lan was located at the entrance of the Silk Road - they were children of the desert and had always harbored a great hatred for the rampaging bandits. Over time, they have become the best guide for the Black Iron Camp, assisting them in eliminating all the desert bandits. The relationship between the two sides was excellent.

Lou Lan people excelled in singing and dancing and especially loved good wine. Men and women were both 'wine demons', their prince was the biggest wine demon among them all.

Marshal Gu's unpredictable strategies or unparalleled martial arts skills, the prince simply did not pay them much mind. Only Gu Yun's ability to use strong alcohol to quench thirst in place of water could make Ban E Duo constantly give his praises, he had proclaimed himself as a 'drinking buddy' of Marshal Gu and treated him with great dedication and responsibility.

Ban E Duo's tone of voice was similar to that of a desert singer, he asks Gu Yun: "Marshal Gu, how come you are moving as swiftly as the clouds at the end of the sky? Are you chasing after the lady of the sunset ?"

Shen Yi: "..."

What is a sunset lady? Both red and round?

Gu Yun: "I am going to slay someone."

"Oh!" Ban E Duo carrying two jugs of wine, he was startled for a while then sullenly asked: "Slaying even more? Didn't you just finish?"

"Do you not eat dinner if you already had breakfast?" Gu Yun shouted with raging murderous intent, "Move aside!"

A few Eagle units appeared like shadows, the tip of their toes slightly touched the ground and followed behind Gu Yun. In a blink of an eye, the black whirlwind swept by without a trace, only the remaining white smoke in the shape of an enchanting circle could be seen in the air.

Ban E Duo looked at his figure from behind with admiration and asked Shen Yi: "Marshal must slay people three times a day?"

Shen Yi waved his hand, gestured for him to come closer and whispered in his ear: "His son was tricked into running away from home by someone."

Ban E Duo held his chest: "Oh! It must be the lady of the full moon!"

Shen Yi: "...No, he only has the head of a full moon."

After leaving the prince feeling the back of his head in distress, Shen Yi walked away with heavy concerns weighing him down. After two steps, his expression suddenly changed - *Oh no, Gu Yun left in such a hurry, did he remember to bring medicine with him?*

Jiangnan welcomed Gu Yun who was covered in dust and sand with a light damp rain. He did not stop to rest for long but immediately marched towards the Ying Tian manor of inspector Yao Zhen.

According to the identity of Gu Yun, he should not have any relationship with the local officials of Jiangnan. This matter actually

had a connection with some old affairs.

When Gu Yun was fifteen years old and followed along the army to eliminate bandits for the first time in his life, he rescued several unlucky hostages who were captured by the bandits - Yao Zhen, who was harmed by others and ended up dismissed home from his position that year, was one of those hostages. Later, Yao Zhen had the opportunity to recover from it and took the position of an inspector, his relationship with Marquis Gu could only be considered as an acquaintance, casual and not involved with personal gains, but somehow, this connection was still maintained until this day.

Master Yao just happened to have a day off today, sleeping until the sun was high up in the sky and still refusing to get up. As he listened to the servant reporting, he was completely startled.

Yao Zhen: "Who did he say he was?"

The servant said: "He said his surname is Gu, Gu Zi Xi."

"Gu Zi Xi," Yao Zhen wiped his eyes and said, "The Marquis of Order, Gu Zi Xi? Then I am the first assistant of the imperial court! - you believe this type of scammer? Send him away!"

The servant responded then was about to turn to take his leave.

"Wait!" Yao Zhen sat up, holding his blanket and pondered for a moment. "... Hold on, I will go check it out myself."

He was suddenly blessed with a momentary stroke of genius. Somehow, he felt that leaving his duty might be something that Gu Yun would do.

At this time, the monk who just happened to stay at the inspector manor had no idea that a great catastrophe was about to fall on his head.

He was an incredibly thrifty man.

A single coin had to be divided into two halves to be spent. If there was a rundown and damaged temple that could serve as a lodge, he would not step foot in an inn. An everyday meal consisted of pickled vegetables, a good meal must depend on donation - commonly known as begging.

He himself did not spend money, he would not allow Chang Geng and the others to spend them either. Fortunately, the three young boys were able to endure hardship, following him to live the life of a homeless drifter day by day.

Liao Ran's route was quite random. Sometimes he led Chang Geng to venture in every narrow pathway and street in the city. Sometimes they would stroll along the fields without any purpose, receiving donated rations regardless of bad or good. They have settled at the house of a generous government official, and have also settled at the house of an ordinary tenant family. In short, they would accept whatever they were able to receive.

One occasion, they happened to stay at the home of a widowed elderly man with no children. When he saw that the man was already left with nothing to eat, not only did he not ask for ration, but he also even gave the man some money in return.

"Even in peace and prosperity, there can exist ones who starve and freeze to death, and even in the turbulent world, there can still exist glory and splendor." Through the market in the town, he signed to Chang Geng.

"The morality in this world should be divided into two. 'Morality' is where one's heart should be directed towards. 'World' is a single grain of rice in a thousand families, a block of brick in a thousand cities."

Chang Geng: "The master should be someone who is already beyond this realm, yet when talking about the common world, you still have a clear and logical view."

Chang Geng's head was almost higher than that of the monk's, the youthfulness distinct in a teenager's voice had completely faded away. His tone was deeper now, his speech pattern was neither slow

or fast, he sounded very stable.

He used to favor quietness, growing uneasy whenever there was a crowd. He always felt that he could never be comfortable when dealing with strangers as he did not know what to say. But unknowingly, he had started to acquire the ability to treat everywhere he went as a casual stroll in an empty courtyard.

Perhaps for he had cut off his own means of retreat, some unwillingness and reluctance in his heart naturally turned into trivial matters.

Liao Ran smiled and calmly said: "If the monk does not understand the world, how can he dare say that he is out of this realm?"

The monk was naturally born with a very sultry face: when washed thoroughly, he appeared like a master who was beyond this world, if he did not for a few days, he appeared like a sacred saint. His head reflected the vast light of Buddha, his eyes always contained a vast pool of cleansing water for all living beings - if he was more generous when it come to a few coins, which were only materialistic, then Chang Geng and the others would really have to admit that he was truly a highly educated master.

Suddenly, Cao Niangzi interrupted him in a low voice: "We should stop talking about this subject, big brother Chang Geng, did you notice that many people are watching us?"

Their group of people - there is a monk, a gentle young master, a plump son from a wealthy household, and even a little girl, although delicate and beautiful, there was something that seemed rather odd about her - they could be very eye-catching when walking together, they have long been used to being pointed at by others, Chang Geng was no longer so sensitive to the eyes of passers-by.

But this time, the onlookers surrounding them seemed rather too much.

The people on the side of the road stopped to look at them, and not only did they do so, they even pointed and secretly exchanged

somethings with each other.

Ge Ban Xiao said: "I feel that something is going to happen."

Chang Geng: "You are right."

As the tallest one out of the four people, Chang Geng looked across the crowd and saw a notice posted on the city tower not far away. The photo showed a realistic portrait of a beautiful bald-headed monk, with a written note below:

This man is disguising as a master from Hu Guo Temple, swindling and abducting, not a single wretched deed that he hadn't done, hereby wanted, the reward will be ten silver coins for any individual who reported him in.

"Master Liao Ran," Chang Geng said, "You're worth ten silver coins."

Master Liao Ran was stunned, standing still in the same place as a beautiful stone statue.

"It must have been that my yifu received the letter from Uncle Wang and sent his people to trouble you." Chang Geng's eyes glanced at the crowd that began to charge forward the 'ten silver coins'. He said, "My apologies, we better be on our way."

Liao Ran quickly said: "Amitabha, Your Highness please don't forget your promise in the tea shop."

Then the monk ran as if his feet were lathered in oil, as quiet as a statue when still, and as swift as the wind when moving.

In the market, the people who waited to capture the 'ten silver coins' saw that they have indirectly affected the grand scheme of things. They decided to abandon all caution and shouted *'rotten monk!'* and *'scammer!'* then attacked from all sides.

Ge Ban Xiao: "My father used to do the same when hunting rabbits in the mountain."

Chang Geng and Cao Niangzi looked at him.

Ge Ban Xiao said: "Holding a stick and screaming, scaring the rabbit, it will lose its direction and charge into the net itself - Ah, it's true."

Master Liao Ran, of course, had more wit than a rabbit. He had soon understood the structure of the town market, quickly turning left and right, his figure became an after image. No one knew how he calculated it, but somehow the people who chased after him from all directions became a single line.

At this time, not far from them, there was a shout of *'Move aside!'*. At a closer look, it was a team of officers and men rushing forward, perhaps they have received the order to arrest people.

Chang Geng thought: *"As expected, Gu Yun had found someone to do all this."*

He felt comforted, but at the same time, he also felt that his good mood was waning out a bit.

His only consolation was that Gu Yun, even far in the northwest, refused to leave him to fend for himself. Although this means of carrying things out was a bit evil, his heart still went out to him.

At the same time, he felt that he had involved Master Liao Ran into this. In addition, that person did not return to the manor even for the New Year. For what reason must he extend his reach out this far?

Cao Niangzi grabbed his sleeve: "Big Brother, what should we do?"

Chang Geng returned from his train of complicated thoughts, and after calculating for a bit, he reached into his own bag, grabbed a handful of silver coins, and scattered them in the direction of the crowd: "Catch the money!"

It was fortunate that Master Liao Ran had run away, otherwise, he must be distressed to the point of growing his hair back.

The people who were chasing the monk was suddenly hit by a handful of silver and was stunned on the spot, their first instinct was

to pick them up. Some others heard that there was real cash and immediately gave up the objective of the same price that was now running away in favor of picking up the real deal, conveniently blocking the ways of the officers and men that were behind. In the blink of an eye, Liao Ran had disappeared.

Chang Geng smiled: "We are also leaving."

After that, he took the lead and pierced through the crowd of people, preparing to disappear from this place without a trace. But a train of horse hooves suddenly sounded from the other side of the narrow street, it seemed to be just in time to corner them in.

If their purpose was not to pick a fight, then it was to arrest people.

Ge Ban Xiao suggested: "Big brother, we should use the small path."

"No," said Cao Niangzi. "We should just stay still and wait."

The approaching hooves stopped at the entrance of the market, a few men appeared to be coming from the military lined up into a row. One person moved forward in the middle...the person whom Chang Geng would recognize even if he turned to ash -

Chang Geng was dumbfounded, he did not expect that Marshal Gu would come all the way from the northwest to arrest him.

Gu Yun had already thoroughly thought this out on the way over. He would skin that Liao Ran first, then take Chang Geng back for a spanking.

A little tree would be bent if not straightened properly. He feels that he was too pampered with this child. The former Emperor's way of parenting simply did not work, he should have followed the method of the iron-faced Old Marquis.

However, the flame of anger boiling inside him, upon seeing Chang Geng, was extinguished suddenly.

Gu Yun, seated on his horse, almost could not recognize Chang Geng.

Teenage boys change every day. Back in Yanhui Town, as Chang Geng was always under his nose, his everyday growth was not at all obvious. He could only tell that he was growing taller by the length of his pants getting shorter. But as they were separated over this one year, Chang Geng's accumulated changes have suddenly turned the teenager unrecognizable.

His head has already caught up with Gu Yun's tall figure, his once thin flesh had started to bear the resemblance of an adult. The unbelieving look on his face only flashed by for a moment, it was immediately covered by his newly learned calmness.

Gu Yun let his horse walk in the same place for a moment, thinking to himself with a blank expression: *"Can't hit him now."*

It's not that he couldn't, but since Chang Geng was already a man, if used the punishment meant for little children, it would not be a lesson but humiliation.

Year after year, there was no difference for Gu Yun: time rushed by, joyless and meaningless.

But at this moment, he suddenly felt the ruthlessness of the time. He just only blinked once, but his small little Chang Geng had hurriedly grown up. All the days that he had missed, he would never be able to make up for them.

Gu Yun finally realized that Chang Geng was fifteen heading for sixteen. In another three or four years, he would move to the Yan Bei Wang manor and leave his wings of protection. What was the concept of three or four years? Perhaps it was only enough for him to return to the capital at least once, then all that is left in their fate was only one more reunion?

After a year, Marshal Gu with the heart the size of a bowl finally reacted.

He dismounted from his horse, walked straight to Chang Geng, and calmly said with a darkened expression: "Follow me."

Chang Geng's gaze had not left his face, he could not bear to look away for even an inch. Gu Yun still had a shallow wound on his neck, coming straight from the northwest desert, it still hasn't had time to heal. Chang Geng struggled to find his own voice: "Yifu, why have you come?"

Gu Yun snorted coldly and sullenly walked out of the market.

Even his way of talking had completely changed, he thought sadly as if he had just lost something.

The officers and men who followed Gu Yun ran up to him: "Grand Marshal, that monk has run away, will we continue to pursue him?"

"Pursue," Gu Yun agreed, "Post the wanted notice throughout the entire city, fish him back out even if he jumped into the sea!"

Officers and soldiers: "Roger!"

Cao Niangzi secretly pulled on the sleeve of Ge Ban Xiao. He felt that in this situation, it was difficult for the two of them to even protect themselves. He had no choice but to shake his head in helplessness, hoping Master Liao Ran would pray himself for more blessing.

Chang Geng and the others followed Gu Yun to the inspector Master Yao's manor. Master Yao had his flattering words prepared to greet the highly esteemed guests, he brought his servants with him to welcome them at the door: "His Fourth Highness had come to this humble house of mine, it truly is my greatest honor! Please come inside, your subject has prepared a feast of wines and dishes for Your Highness."

He barely finished his sentence but Gu Yun had already displayed the face similar to the Hell King. A sentence was written clearly on it - *feast, what feast? Just let him starve to death.*

For the whole night, Gu Yun could not figure out the proper way to talk to Chang Geng. He stayed alone in his room, chugging down cup after cup of Lou Lan wine that he had brought with him. After a while, someone knocked on his door.

Gu Yun: "Come in."

Chang Geng gently pushed the door open and walked in: "Yifu."

Gu Yun did not say anything, his expression unfathomable.

Chang Geng turned to close the door and lowered his head slightly as if staring at Gu Yun for a long time would cause his strength to dissipate.

Chang Geng: "Yifu, I missed you very much."

Gu Yun was silent for a moment then finally sighed: "Come here, let me look at you."

Chang Geng came forward obediently, A strange scent of alcohol was surrounding Gu Yun, it was a bit sweet, seemed to be a type of wine from the Western Regions. Hanging on his shoulders was the cold and hard iron armor that hasn't been changed for years, Chang Geng thought that he could remain restrained, but he had once again overestimated himself - just as he did not expect Gu Yun to actually travel to Jiangnan to find him.

He heaved a sigh of relief and rushed forward to hug Gu Yun.

Chapter 29: Dragon Disaster

T/N: Just want to remind again that this book is VERY story-driven and heavy in plots as you can already see. The first super large scale conflict of the story is starting from this point, I'm very excited to translate them since they are really fun.

And enjoy some heart to heart talk with yifu.

—

"The Eastern Sea demon is transforming into a dragon, this monk came with the purpose of bringing divide punishment onto it."

—

In that moment, all the anger and irritation inside Gu Yun vanished in the wind.

He reached out to catch Chang Geng and gently patted his back a few times, his chin rubbed against the boy's shoulder. He felt that his arms were no longer just an empty bone structure.

Gu Yun also very much wanted to say out loud the words *'I missed you too'* but even at this age, he had never spoken of such words before, the sentence rolled around up and down three times inside, but in the end, it fled back to his stomach in fright.

He just smiled faintly: "Already this old and still acting spoiled?"

Chang Geng closed his eyes, he knew that he could no longer exceed the boundary. Affection could not be controlled, but his limbs and body could be.

He obediently let go of Gu Yun and calmly stood on one side, enduring the invisible wildfire in his chest. He knew that he wanted too much to the point of irrationality, even causing many types of grievances and hatred to be born from it, and they were all so

despicable and ugly, thus he dared not let them be seen in any way.

Chang Geng took a deep breath and asked: "How come yifu had travelled to Jiangnan?"

Gu Yun glared at him then unhappily replied: "Still have the face to ask, was it not because of you?"

Chang Geng did not dare to look at him for long, he bowed his head slightly.

Gu Yun only assumed that he had just said heavy words. The reprimands that had already reached the tip of his tongue was hurriedly swallowed back by himself. He curled his thumb into the palm of his hand, flexing the joints back and forth two or three times. The exhaustion from traveling for a thousand miles came crashing on him. He endured this sudden tiredness, and after pondering over it several times, he tried to stay as calm as possible and said to Chang Geng: "Sit down, tell me why were you with that bald... ahem."

Gu Yun realized that it was not appropriate to call Liao Ran a bald donkey in front of Chang Geng. But he could never say the word 'master' either, hence he was stuck in the middle.

Chang Geng: "When Master Liao Ran wanted to travel to the south, it was me who had insisted on going with him. If yifu troubled him for this reason, I would also feel uneasy."

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng was too good at talking. With just one sentence, he had asked for the donkey to be pardoned, and not angered Gu Yun at the same time. Inside and outside were made distinctively clear causing Gu Yun to almost feel 'uneasy' himself. He was secretly surprised for the second time today, only a year had passed, how did the child who used to be as straightforward as a wooden pole learn this way of talking?

"When yifu was my age, you have already ventured to the South to ease the rebellion, but me, I am still inexperienced and

incompetent, thus I had wanted to leave the manor to see the world outside."

Chang Geng sneaked a glimpse of Gu Yun and found that there was bloodshot in his eyes, he was unable to speak anymore, guilt rose from his chest to his throat, he whispered: "...just that my means of doing things was impulsive, even troubling yifu to travel from a distance away, I was wrong, yifu, please punish me."

Gu Yun was silent for a while then suddenly said: "Truth was, the first time I went on the expedition, it was actually thanks to Old General Du and the others from the previous Marquis' old faction who worked hard to bring forth their request to the former Emperor."

Chang Geng looked up.

Gu Yun was not a very modest person. When he had had too much, he often ran his mouth. Even words of fib such as 'I can put down twenty iron puppets in half an incense time with my ears plugged and my eyes blindfolded' had come from him before.

However, when one thought about it, he became famous in his youth. This chain of glorious history, from holding in his hand the token of command to march forward the West, to the restoration of the Black Iron Camp, even just one of the above was enough to talk about for half a lifetime, yet Gu Yun had never mentioned them.

Gu Yun poured a cup full of a type of sour wine for Chang Geng: "This is the wine of Lou Lan people. You have also grown up, you can have a few sips."

Chang Geng took a mouthful but wasn't able to make out any taste. He set it aside. He and Gu Yun have not seen each other for a long time, just seeing him here now was enough to stir his blood into a frenzy, he really did not need to add alcohol into it.

Gu Yun: "I didn't understand anything at that time, going with them only to cause more chaos, combined with my youthful arrogance, I had refused to admit my shortcoming."

"On the way to eliminate the bandits, I was too eager to take the

initiative and acted alone. Just a small campaign ended up losing more than thirty Heavy Armors that real money was poured into, not only that, it even caused serious injuries to old General Du... Have you heard of General Du Chang De?"

Chang Geng had heard of him before from Liao Ran, the monk was perhaps even more familiar with the magistrates and military personnel of the former dynasty than he was with Buddha's scriptures.

Ten years ago, the Old Marquis and his wife both passed away due to illness. Gu Yun was still young. It was General Du who dutifully took care of both sides from the frontier to the imperial court and had single-handedly carried the current state of affairs. Unfortunately, his old wounds acted up, later on, he had passed away while on the Northwest campaign. Thus he had let Gu Yun, who was only seventeen years old at the time, to take the position of a commander in this expedition.

Gu Yun: "At that time if it wasn't because of me, the old man would still remain healthy and strong, his old injuries would not have acted up just because of a simple cold."

"After eliminating the enemies in the south and returning to the capital, when reporting to the imperial court, he did not once mention any of my mistakes, from start to finish he only talked of my merits and continued to keep me in the army."

Gu Yun paused for a while as he got here.

Suddenly he felt that this was all too unbelievable. All the way over, he had only thought about how to reprimand Chang Geng once he caught the boy, from both lectures to real actions. No one expected for it to evolve into him sitting down to confess his own humiliating old affairs.

He had thought that he will conceal these matters forever, but as he looked at them now, he found that he can actually face them with ease.

This was beyond his understanding.

Perhaps Shen Yi is right. Young ones and old father were indeed heavy burdens, making people bow down to clearly examine themselves.

"The reason why I am in this position is not because I am better than anyone, but because my name is Gu," Gu Yun said, looking at Chang Geng. "Sometimes, your origin determines what you must do, and what you must not do."

This was the first time Gu Yun explained to Chang Geng the reason why he could not take him to the northwest, although it was quite hard to comprehend.

Chang Geng looked at him intently.

Gu Yun considered for a while then said again: "But if you had clearly thought about what kind of path you want to take, you don't have to worry too much. As long as I am alive, I will always have the strength to sweep away any obstacles in your path."

Chang Geng thought that after all this time of following Master Liao Ran, he had already trained himself to be able to make a conversation with most of everyone with ease. But he only now realized that "everyone" still excluded Gu Yun just as before. The moment he faced the man, he would become strangely clumsy in his speeches.

He always thought he was the burden that the old Emperor cast to Gu Yun, that he was a greedy being who longed for the world that did not belong to him, but this was not the case.

Chang Geng thought, *no one else in this world could ever treat him like Gu Yun did.*

Just then, there was a sudden flash of a figure outside the door: "Marshal."

Gu Yun pulled himself together and waved his hand at Chang Geng: "Go rest early, following that monk, you couldn't have eaten and slept well - Ah, or do you want to stay here and sleep with me?"

Chang Geng: "..."

His mind exploded into fireworks, immediately blushing red all the way to his ears.

Gu Yun smiled and said: "Also learned how to feel embarrassed now. Before when you used to get scared into tears from nightmares, wasn't it me who coaxed you back to sleep?"

Chang Geng really didn't know how to handle this kind of face-to-face mockery - the main point was how Gu Yun directly said it as if that was a real thing!

The boy suddenly became empty-headed and quickly ran out of Gu Yun's room like gliding on clouds.

After Chang Geng left, Gu Yun waved his hand to the figure outside the door: "Come in."

A soldier dressed in Black Eagle armor immediately entered.

The soldier said: "As your subordinate is ordered to hunt down the monk..."

Liao Ran secretly tricked the Fourth Prince into leaving the capital, although this matter was indeed outrageous, but the boy had also been found now. Gu Yun could not afford to offend Hu Guo Temple too much, not to mention Chang Geng himself even asked pardon on the monk's behalf.

Gu Yun: "Forget it, tell Chong Ze to withdraw the wanted order, that it is only a misunderstanding. I will treat Master Liao Ran to a meal later on."

'Chong Ze' is the name of Master Yao Zhen - although he said so, as long as Liao Ran still had his wit with him, he would not dare to come to the banquet. Gu Yun was certain that as long as the other man saw his face, he could not even drink a drop of water.

The Black Eagle soldier whispered: "Your subordinate is incompetent. I have yet to find any trace of that monk. But towards the evening, I caught sight of him boarding a small boat, I proceeded to send out men for inspection, and we have discovered something."

He said as he took out a small bag and retrieved a small strip of cloth with bits of golden powder on it.

Gu Yun took one look and immediately frowned.

This thing was very familiar to him. Its name was "Sui Xi" - an ore that comes with Ziliujin. After being crushed into powder, it could be added to Ziliujin at a certain proportion to prevent accidental explosions during long-distance transportation. A special process was used to filter them out of the ZIliujin afterwards, very convenient.

However, the general court when transporting Ziliujin, if not in the air by the Giant Kite, then it was by using the official road escorted by the local garrison troops. How can there be such a thing just mixed in randomly on a small boat of some monk?

Gu Yun: "Did you remember not to disclose this?"

Black Eagle soldier: "Marshal can rest assured."

Gu Yun stood up and took two steps in the same place: "If so then, the wanted order cannot be withdrawn, we must catch that monk. Ask the brothers to trace that boat for me, find out where it came from, where its destination is..."

When Gu Yun said this, his voice suddenly stopped, and he suddenly found his vision starting to become fuzzy, the figure of the soldier not far away from him became a blur.

"This is bad," Gu Yun quietly thought, "Leaving in such a hurry, I forgot to bring medicine."

No wonder he had the feeling as if he had forgotten something,

Shen Yi this good for nothing did not even remind him.

Black Eagle soldier: "Grand Marshal?"

Gu Yun casually continued: "If possible, it is best to find out who the boat owner is, pay special attention to who they regularly deal with."

The soldier had absolutely no suspicion: "Roger."

"Wait, also," Gu Yun called him, "If you find the monk, bring him to see me."

The Black Eagle soldier immediately left upon receiving his orders.

After sending him away, Gu Yun turned up the steam lamp on the table and sat down.

Jiangnan does not produce Ziliujin. If those boats truly had problems, there were only two possible circumstances. Either Jiangnan had officials who were selling them privately, or they came from overseas.

If it was the former, then this was quite easy to explain. Jiangnan was rich and far from the capital, those people were simply taking advantage of the farming puppets currently being carried out to sneak in some Ziliujin for themselves. This matter could be handled by the local inspectors, it was not his place to reach into.

But if it was the latter, then he's afraid this would be complicated.

The seven major military factions of Great Liang were not weak, "Armor" and "Eagle" were the most powerful, especially. That was the accumulation of the three generations of Ling Shu Institute, pouring in all their hearts and souls to build up. In this respect, they were not inferior to the crafts of Western people.

Only Dragons were different.

Although Dragons of Great Liang were meant for naval battle, they were generally only used for coastal defense and to keep watch, rarely going out to sea. They were not similar to the giant ships of the Westerners that could brave the wind and ride the waves.

This had always been the case - when the naval commercial roads were connected to the east, west, north, and south, all the ports on the coastline were packed with western ships. That year, under Emperor Wu's regency, Great Liang was rich in wealth and did not care about daily trades with the Westerners. It was mostly the foreigners who came here for gold-digging.

At that time, the so-called 'trading business' was simply the other party who brought their products to the port, they only have to open the door, keep some of the goods, and reward them with pocket money.

As for the current Emperor and his father before him, although they have recognized the profits of sea transportation business and harbored great enthusiasm for it, but unfortunately, as the northwestern frontline was always unstable, the naval defense plan of the giant dragons was pushed back. If it was not due to the lack of funds, then it was due to the lack of Ziliujin.

If the boat was actually involved in the private selling of Ziliujin, it would very likely threaten the coastal defense of the Eastern Sea.

There was also that monk Liao Ran who has led them to the boat. Is it unintentional? or was it his plan all along?

In just a short time, Gu Yun's vision had already become more and more blurred. He found the Liuli glass in his chest and temporarily put it on his nose. At least this way, one eye could see clearly.

Gu Yun smiled sadly and thought to himself: "What should I do now?"

Chang Geng who had fled back to his own room, his heartbeat was still not steady yet. When he pushed the door open and saw a monk, his heart instantly tensed up again. He quickly closed the door and lowered his voice: "Master, how come you are you here?"

Then, Liao Ran put his hands together and smiled: "Amitabha, there is no place that this monk cannot enter."

This monk must have been trained to come and go at any time without a trace, the inspector manor was no different. Truly resembling a god.

The monk signed to Chang Geng: "Perhaps the Marquis of Order had spared me this time, Your Highness does not have to worry."

Chang Geng wasn't worried about him. His mind was clear, figuring it out with just one thought: "Are you deliberately using me to lure him here? What is there to see in Ying Tian manor?"

Liao Ran looked at him with great appreciation, he slowly extended his hands to sign: "The Eastern Sea demon is transforming into a dragon, this monk came with the purpose of bringing divine punishment onto it."

What is he suggesting? Was Wei Wang going to rebel?

Or was there something else?

Instantly, several thoughts flew by Chang Geng's heart. He was long aware that this monk was immersed in the mortal world. He did not expect him to be immersed so deeply, a layer of suspicion and caution could not help but raise up in his eyes.

However, before he could ask more questions, Liao Ran made a gesture for Chang Geng to keep up with him and jumped out of the window. Chang Geng hesitated, then grabbed his sword and followed along.

Chapter 30: Scented Balms

—

Deaf whole-heartedly.

—

Chang Geng chased after the monk to the outside of the city. It was already deep into the night, the surrounding was quiet and only the faint sound of the wooden cart patrolling in the city could be heard. He then stopped and called out to the other: "Master, please slow down your footsteps."

Liao Ran came to a stop.

Chang Geng spoke slowly, not a trace of anger in his attitude. He was gentle and courteous, similar to how he used to sit quietly in the meditation room that year while sipping Ku Ding tea.

Only his hand had moved to the hilt of his sword. The blade could be unsheathed at any moment and easily pierce the monk into a meat skewer.

Chang Geng: "I have had the chance to converse with the master a lot these days, I have also had much to gain from them. I know that Master's heart goes out to the civilians in this country, you are not one to stay still in a temple, discussing Buddha's teachings only in theory."

"As for my origin, perhaps Master have also heard about it. The Marquis's might is displayed for thousands of miles, a renowned general for this generation. But no matter what position this country had placed him onto, to me, he is still a family member that I'm mutually dependent with in order to live."

"I am simply a minor character with no ability, the weapon in my hands is only enough to maintain a peaceful life for myself. I am not capable enough to dwell on the grander scheme of things."

"My heart only contains the Marquis's manor as big as the palm

of my hand, and a few number of people, I still hope that the Master will explain clearly."

Liao Ran: "..."

He did not know how Chang Geng usually talked with Gu Yun, but for outsiders, his speeches had always remained 'few words, deep meanings'. Liao Ran had soon thought that he already experienced it himself, but he still never expected that in this world, even words filled with murderous intent such as *'Friendship is friendship, if you will dare touch Gu Yun, I will pierce you with this sword'* — could be conveyed in such a calm manner.

Liao Ran looked down at his shoes. Due to excessive walking and running these few days, they had lost their original color. He tried to test the water: "Your Highness came from the line of nobility, you are kind and benevolent. Your heart should contain the vastness of heaven and earth, there is no need to degrade yourself as such."

Chang Geng remained stable, not at all moved by his words: "Men born in this world, if one could not even keep the small arc of land around them safe, then what use would it be to cast one's sight so far out?"

Liao Ran let out a bitter smile, he knew Chang Geng was not so easily fooled, he had no choice but to make a solemn vow: "Marshal Gu is the pillar of the country, pulling one strand of hair would affect the entire body, how can this monk ever dare to act out of line?"

Chang Geng's hand still remained on the hilt of the sword: "But Master still has every intention of bringing my yifu to this place."

Liao Ran said with all seriousness: "Your Highness, please come with me."

Chang Geng stared at him for a moment and lifted the sword again. He smiled and said: "Then, thank you for your trouble, Master, in leading the way to make clear of this situation."

If you can't make it clear then I would still have to pierce you.

The monk took off his outer robe and turned it inside out. His

white attire actually had two sides. The inside was black, and when used to cover himself, the monk's entire figure disappeared into the night.

Chang Geng: "..."

A question had involuntarily emerged in his heart — throughout their travel from the capital to Jiangnan, he had never seen Liao Ran change his clothes. In the end, did the inside of his robe had a black color, or was it the result of him wearing it for a great length of time?

With this in mind, Chang Geng who had a quirk for cleanliness suddenly felt that there was no way he could walk alongside the monk anymore!

Dressed in his 'night clothes', Liao Ran led Chang Geng through Jiangnan with many small rivers and bridges, and soon arrived at the Inner Canal Pier.

The passage between the sea route of Great Liang and the inland canal had been opened ten years ago. The two passages were parallel to one another, very convenient for ships to come and go. It had brought prosperity to the entire area along the seaside. In recent years, due to heavy taxes, it appeared to be a bit depressed.

However, a dead camel was still bigger than a horse. At this time, although it was already late at night, there were still many merchant ships and boatmen rushing on the dock.

Liao Ran waved his hand to stop Chang Geng's footsteps and said: "The Black Iron Camp already have watching eyes in front, we can't approach any further."

Chang Geng glanced at him, then took out a Tian Li Yan to look at the water.

The pier was calm, boatmen and delivery workers came and went. There were some soldiers who were transferred from the Jiangnan garrison standing on the shore, checking the goods. He could not see any Black Iron Camp's people, nor could he see any abnormalities in the water.

Chang Geng did not trust Liao Ran this time, he did not directly pose any question but observed the scene silently.

The boatmen were loading the goods, they were uniformly packed in thin wooden boxes. Before boarding on the ship, the lid of each box must be opened and placed onto a conveyor belt. The garrison guards would then check them over thoroughly. The checked boxes will be transported to the other end where several workers waited there to carry the properly sealed boxes onto the ship.

A few days ago, he had heard the local people gossiping about it — the sea and river transportation terminal wasn't quite strict on merchant ships before, but due to Jiangnan's recent implementation of farming puppets, the imperial court had distributed a large quantity of *Ziliujin* here. To prevent any private reselling, they had tightened the checking process.

As soon as one box was opened for inspection, even when separated by a hundred feet, Chang Geng still couldn't help but wrinkle his nose: "What is that scent?"

Liao Ran wrote on the tree next to them: "Compressed scented balm."

Chang Geng: "What?"

Liao Ran signed: "Your Royal Highness stayed in the Marquis's manor, the balm used there must have been sent down from the imperial court unlike the cheap goods that the civilians use."

"These are piles of an assortment of spices and herbs left over from the making of scented products, compressed into oil or paste, very strong in scent. After buying, three layers of sealed cans must be added to prevent letting the scent out. Only a small portion was required, after diluting with warm water, it can be used for several months."

"Each scented balm is only the size of a thumb, to use for nine or ten years is not a problem, it would only cost one string of coins."

The compressed balm was too heavy in scent. After the fragrance had reached a certain degree, it completely turned into a bad smell instead. Chang Geng's head hurt from inhaling them. He did not even have the mind to correct the monk's misunderstanding. The manor had never used balm, the washed clothes only had the scent of saponin soap.

Chang Geng raised his Tian Li Yan and suddenly saw a figure of a man on the merchant ship. His hairstyle, accessories, and clothing were different from the Central Plains people. Chang Geng recalled the knowledge of foreign countries that Liao Ran once taught him, he asked: "I seemed to just caught sight of a Dong Ying* man according to what you have told me before, then this is a merchant ship to be sent to Dong Ying... What do Dong Ying people require this much scented balms for? Take them home and cook them?"

**Dong Ying is another name of Japan*

Liao Ran gave him a look filled with appreciation.

The wooden boxes containing the balms lined up in a long line resembling a dragon, four or five ships hidden in the dark night waited for them, appearing even more spectacular than the merchant ships that carried fresh aquatic products and seafood docked next to them.

If a single scented balm could be used for ten years or eight years, why would anyone buy this much?

Not to mention the small size of Dong Ying islands, even the mass of entire Great Liang could not necessarily be able to use up the number of balms here on these ships.

The guards on the dock were soaked with tears, holding a handkerchief to their noses, desperately urging the boatmen to hurry away with the cargo boxes. There was originally a dog that assisted the inspection, but it had been soon rendered useless by the too strong scent, lying motionlessly on the side.

Chang Geng whispered: "Might I ask the Master, the dog next to the guards, what is it used for?"

"That is the 'inspection dog'," he said: "*Ziliujin* has a faint scent of metallic bitterness, people can't detect it but dogs are very sensitive. *Ziliujin* is a matter of great importance. Back when Emperor Wu was strictly taking care of *Ziliujin* black markets, inspection dogs had made great contributions and are still of use until today."

The cheap scented balms had caused the dog's eyes to turned white. Right now it could not even sense meat and bones, let alone *Ziliujin*.

Chang Geng: "The Master suspects that this team of Dong Ying merchants has an ulterior purpose, thus you have led my yifu here to investigate?"

However, before he even had time to nod, Chang Geng immediately asked: "So dare I ask the master, how do you know that my family's Marquis will come in person? And this matter should be taken care of by the local Ying Tian manor in charge and the garrison troops of Jiangnan. He abandoned his duty to get here, how do you know that he will definitely intervene?"

"Why didn't you go find the governor or the inspectors, why must you skip the nearby solution to reach out to the one further away and go through many troubles to bring him here from the northwest?"

Liao Ran: "..."

He used to think that as the boy went out alone for the first time, running into such a grand conspiracy like this — when in a state of shock, it was easy to overlook many things — but he did not expect that Chang Geng was not at all shocked. From beginning to end, he only frowned once. Moreover, he even insisted on getting to the bottom of the matter.

The monk could not help but think of the rumors that when Gu Yun brought this child back from the town of Yanhui — some people have said that the barbarian rebellion in that area was pushed forward by the foster mother of the Fourth Prince, but His Highness had put aside familial love for the country, providing the Black Iron Camp with preparations to exterminate the barbarians.

How old would Chang Geng be at that time? At best, he was only twelve or thirteen years old...

Suddenly Liao Ran really wanted to ask, *"When Yanhui town fell into chaos, have you killed a person?"*. After a while, he swallowed it back down, feeling that such a question wasn't necessary.

Chang Geng looked at him quietly, and under the moonlit night, Liao Ran saw two shallow shadows from his eyes.

He knew that Chang Geng had developed a special kind of intelligence and sharpness at an early age. He thought that it was the sensitivity born from the drastic changes he had to face at a young age, combined with living at other's expense at the capital. Until this moment, the monk suddenly realized that the boy's eyes contained a dark corner that no one knew of or have seen.

He suspected that even Gu Yun did not know.

Liao Ran's attitude became a lot more serious, after a moment of deliberation, Liao Ran slowly signed: "I know that he will come. I also know that when he comes, he will definitely intervene. This matter is on a very large scale and cannot be handled by one small Ying Tian manor — there are things that inside, the Marquis is also fully aware of, much like those of us."

Chang Geng blinked, he noticed that Liao Ran had just said *us*.

At this moment, there was suddenly a strong gust of wind behind him, Liao Ran wasn't able to react yet but the decorative sword hanging at Chang Geng's waist had already flown out of its sheath. This was the instinctive reaction built from countless times he had crossed sword with the iron puppet.

The bright white sabre clashed with the black iron of the Wind Slasher, Chang Geng recognized that the other person was a Black Eagle soldier. Two sides then withdrew their weapons at the same time.

The soldier got down on one knee: "My apology for the sudden disturbance — the Marquis had asked your subordinates to bring

Your Highness and the Master back."

Chang Geng lifted his eyebrows. How did Gu Yun know that he and Liao Ran had sneaked out to come here?

What was the *'fully aware of inside'* that the monk had mentioned before?

However, Liao Ran was not surprised. He took off his ridiculous headscarf, put his hands together to express courtesy, then silently expressed his meaning without words — *Thank you for your trouble.*

As soon as they returned, Chang Geng was immediately sent back to his room. He did not know what Gu Yun and Liao Ran had discussed with one another but early in the next morning, there was a Black Eagle soldier knocking on his door.

The soldier said: "Master Liao Ran must continue to travel, Marshal must also rush back to the northwest, your subordinate was ordered to escort Your Highness back to the manor, please indicate the suitable time for a convenient departure."

If he did not witness the Dong Ying's merchant ships at the dock the night before, Chang Geng felt that he would have truly believed these words.

But before he could open his mouth, someone knocked on the wooden handrail.

The Black Eagle soldier turned back and saw the mysterious mute monk, not knowing since when he had stood there. Liao Ran quickly used sign language at Chang Geng, telling him to wait a bit, then directly reached out to push open the door to Gu Yun's room.

The soldier and Chang Geng were both stunned — the monk did not knock at the door at all!

If it wasn't for the fact that the entire Marquis's manor knew that Gu Yun hated bald heads, Chang Geng would almost believe that the relationship between the two was not ordinary.

Perhaps he was afraid of being kicked out by force, for after

opening the door, he did not enter the room directly but only stood outside and paid his respect to the person inside.

Gu Yun actually did not pay it any mind. Only an impatient voice was heard: "What does the Master have in mind?"

Liao Ran signed: "Marshal, the young bird did not grow up in a golden cage, let alone this time, you are still in need of a few attendants to avoid the people's eyes and ears. Why not bring His Highness with you? The former Emperor had left the title of *Yan Bei* and the status of a *Jun Wang* for His Highness. After a year or two, he should also enter the imperial court."

Gu Yun replied coldly: "The Master has extended your reach quite far out."

At this time, Liao Ran took a step forward and suddenly crossed the room's entrance. He seemed to make a gesture to Gu Yun where others could not see.

Inside the room, Gu Yun suddenly became silent.

Chang Geng heard that Cao Niangzi whispered behind him: "What do you mean? Where is the Marshal taking us?"

Suddenly, his heart was pounding like mad. Chang Geng knew full well, with Gu Yun's personality, there was no chance that the man would agree on taking him along. He soon assumed that he must choose between 'secretly following him, acting on his own' or 'obediently returning to the capital and not worry him', he had never hoped that Gu Yun would let him come with.

But this time, with a sense of hope suddenly ignited within him, a layer of sweat involuntarily broke out in his palms.

Even when confronted with the barbarians, he was not so nervous.

After a long while, he heard Gu Yun sigh: "It's fine to come along, but do not leave my side, do what we have discussed before."

Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi let out their cheers even though

they did not know where they were going and what for, Chang Geng lowered his head and coughed, trying to suppress the happy and innocent smile on his lips. At the same time, another question floated in his heart — *what did Liao Ran say to Gu Yun?*

Is there anyone in this world that could convince his yifu?

Not long after, a ragged carriage went in the direction of the suburbs.

Inside, there was a monk, a 'weak scholarly' master, bringing with him two servants and a little girl. All the Eagle units with Gu Yun before had all disappeared.

Chang Geng couldn't help but look at Gu Yun. He had taken off all his armors and changed into a high-necked robe with large flowing sleeves, the wound on his neck was also hidden away. He did not tie his hair up, letting them scattered down like a mockery to the bald driver. A piece of black cloth covered his eyes.

As the upper half of his face could not be seen, Chang Geng found that his attention had involuntarily stayed on yifu's pale lips. He forced himself to divert his eyes somewhere else and retracted his gaze.

Ge Ban Xiao couldn't help but ask: "Marquis sir, why must you disguise as such?"

Gu Yun slightly turned his head in his direction and pointed to one ear, seriously saying: "I am deaf, don't talk to me."

Ge Ban Xiao: "..."

Deaf whole-heartedly.

No one knew whose idea it was, but Gu Yun was intending to use the identity of a fragrance expert to mix into the boats currently carrying scented balms.

Some folks in the fragrance business believed that the five senses will hinder the sense of smell, they would make little children blind and deaf, only relying on their sense of smell to live. The fragrance experts cultivated in this way were of the highest class, the common folks referred to them as 'fragrant master'. Once they had successfully graduated, even hundred and thousands of gold was difficult to use to invite one.

Gu Yun blindfolded his eyes and pretended that he was deaf. From the time he went out, he even asked others not to talk to him, wholeheartedly playing this role.

When they arrived at the dock, someone was already waiting there to welcome them. Chang Geng lifted the curtain of the carriage and saw a short middle-aged man pleasantly smiling at their direction: "Mister Zhang was a bit late, did something happen on the way?"

There was no telling whose identity Gu Yun was currently using for himself, Chang Geng suspected that the genuine fragrant master was already kidnapped by the Black Eagle soldiers while on his way. His expression did not change, he only put his hands together and said, "My apologies, the eyes and ears of our master are inconvenient."

The middle-aged man was stunned, Gu Yun reached out and patted Chang Geng's arm, then reached out his hand for the boy to lead him.

Chang Geng quickly caught his hand, at the same time he was puzzled: "*Even if it was only pretending, his eyes are still blindfolded. How come his movements do not have any hint of inconvenience?"*

He did not even feel around first before reaching for Chang Geng, as if he was long used to not being able to see.

However, this doubt only flashed by for a moment. When Gu Yun stepped out of the carriage, he had to bend down slightly and almost fell into the Chang Geng's arms. As he suddenly removed all his armor, his figure seemed a bit slim, Chang Geng had an illusion that just by reaching out, he could gather the man into his arms.

This made his mouth and throat quickly become dry, his sharp wits when questioning Liao Ran before was gone without a trace, he was only able to maintain his calmness on the surface. With the thoughts in his head running astray, unable to stop and in a daze at the same time, he led Gu Yun in front of the middle-aged man.

The man's expression quickly flashed with suspicion and caution, he said, "My apologies for not knowing you are a 'fragrant master', we are just a small business, selling scented balms worth a few coins a can, how could we ever invite someone such as yourself..."

His words were not finished, but several men dressed in boatmen clothing had turned around, the eyes of each of them shone brightly, their temples were slightly bulging*. One could tell by just a glance that there was no way these men were just boatmen.

**bulging temples are signs that*
they are well-trained martial artists.

Chang Geng bowed his head slightly, stepped forward and subtly hid Gu Yun's hand behind him, then wrote in Gu Yun's palm: *"Master, they asked of our origin."*

Chapter 31: Hao Li

**people believe that Hao Li is the place all souls go to after death.*

T/N: An emotional rollercoaster

—

Chang Geng: "Do not touch him!"

—

Gu Yun's face remained unchanged, he calmly brought out an envelope and handed it to Chang Geng.

There was no content inside the envelope, its surface let out a sharp and chilled scent, seemingly a mixture of agarwood and something else.

The night before, the Eagle units have found three envelopes from the captured fragrant master - this was one of them. All three envelopes have a different scent, that fragrant master was quite stubborn, he did not talk no matter how hard they interrogated him. But of course, in such a short amount of time, even if he confessed, Gu Yun would not necessarily believe him.

Among the three envelopes, the only one that Gu Yun could explain the source of was this one.

According to legend, a rotten emperor from one of the previous dynasties believed in dark demonic arts, he had ordered men to create a kind of fragrance that could help him ascend to the higher realm. It was named 'Yuhuang' - cold and unclear, graceful and luxurious.

The former emperor once secretly saved a little for himself. He

decided to use it one year on a whim, its scent truly was different from the incense commonly used in the palace.

The former emperor told him that although it smelled pleasant, this fragrance was also known as the '*death of a country*'. Secretly using a small bit in private was alright, but if the ministers found out, they would make a huge ruckus, thus this matter must be kept hidden at all cost.

After many years, Gu Yun's impression of this '*death of a country*' scent still remained.

Chang Geng just tensed up a bit yet Gu Yun had immediately noticed it, without waiting for him to write on his palm, he began to speculate how likely it was to be able to deceive those people by throwing this envelope out.

Gu Yun calculated for a while and thought to himself: *"To pick one in three, the percentage is still quite high. If it doesn't succeed then earth can hinder incoming flood, soldiers can hinder incoming swords."*

Fortunately, he was the only one who held this 'success percentage', the others were forced to calm down as they could only see an unquestionable certainty on his face.

The middle-aged man's expression shifted. He took the envelope and sniffed it back and forth several times, his face unpredictable.

Chang Geng thought: *"Do we still have to use force?"*

Gu Yun patted his tensed up hand.

The middle-aged man looked up at Gu Yun. His attitude had become a lot more earnest compared to before. He said: "My name is Di Song, I am the chief of these merchant ships. Might I ask where the Master is from and where your destination is?"

This is a slang, Chang Geng wrote it down clearly in Gu Yun's palm.

Gu Yun opened his mouth for the first time and said: "Came from the ground, going to Hao Li."

The middle-aged man named Di Song seemed to be taken aback, he hesitated for a moment, his voice weakened slightly: "Then... then I've troubled the master. Please, this way."

Gu Yun stood still without moving; deaf fully and wholeheartedly. Only until Chang Geng gently tugged him that he would follow after his lead with a blank face, appearing flawlessly like a true 'fragrant master' who had lost all his senses.

Then using Gu Yun's wide sleeves as a cover, Chang Geng wrote in his hand: "*How did yifu know of their slang?"*

This was actually the dialogue between the two crew members which the Eagle units had overheard when they were ordered to monitor the merchant ships. They had reported to him every single detail regardless of big or small. Truth was, Gu Yun did not know what those words meant, but he was still able to make use of it to fool the other party.

Just like a wolf, he lied to Chang Geng: "I know everything."

Chang Geng: "..."

The group was able to board the Dong Ying's merchant ship smoothly, several Dong Ying people appeared, curiously looking at the fragrant master in legends.

Dong Ying was influenced by Great Liang, Buddhist culture was also widespread. Many of them saw that a monk was following behind Gu Yun and came forward to greet.

Chang Geng quietly observed these Dong Ying people - the number of them were even more than he had imagined. Using the name of escorting merchant ships, they were equipped with long blades, some even had iron wristbands with strangely shaped darts* on their wrists and ankles. Coming closer, one could sense the faint smell of blood on them.

**Japanese ninja's shuriken*

Suddenly, a shout came from behind them. A masked Dong Ying

man landed down behind Gu Yun - and without a word, swinging his curved dagger at Gu Yun's back.

Chang Geng's reaction was extremely fast, the sword was not yet unsheathed from its cover, but the opponent's dagger had already been stopped.

The Dong Ying man let out a strange scream, his petite body twisted into a weird arc - his whole figure resembled a snake without bones, the dagger in his hand became a demonic and wicked viper, sending seven slashes towards Chang Geng in succession. Something inside his left shoulder suddenly opened up: a Dong Ying's dart came flying straight towards Gu Yun.

No one knew whether Gu Yun had insisted that once he played this role, he must commit to it until the very end or what - he continued to stand still in one place, unconscious of everything that was happening!

In a moment of desperation, Chang Geng's blade and its scabbard were split into two, he tossed the scabbard out with force, driving the dart out of its flying projectile when it almost grazed past Gu Yun's chest.

This was not the first time Chang Geng had crossed sword with someone, it was not the first time he was plunged into a dangerous confrontation either - but it was the first time someone almost injured his yifu right in front of his eyes. A layer of red suddenly surfaced on his pupils, Bone of Impurity inside his body abruptly raised up.

He shouted, his wrists suddenly pointed downward, using the same move he did to deal with the sword training puppet. The dagger in the hands of the Dong Ying man trembled fiercely, appearing almost bent from the force. Not waiting for the other to retract his weapon, Chang Geng had already kicked him in the stomach.

Legend has it; in order to make it convenient for climbing the walls and gliding on roofs for assassination missions, the assassins' bodies must be smaller than that of the ordinary people. This snake-like man must be the best among the best. Although they were

incredibly flexible, they were still not good at enduring direct force. Chang Geng's kick almost shattered the man's intestines, he could not even hold on to his weapon anymore and was forced to retreat.

Chang Geng did not want to let him go, he kicked the dagger on the ground up with the tip of his foot, grabbed hold of it and nailed in front of the man, the long sword in his hand spun in a circle, about to cut the Dong Ying man into two.

This was all happening too fast, enemies and friends surrounding them, no one was able to react. As Chang Geng was quickly delivering a decisive blow intended to take his opponent's life, three shouts of *'stop!'* sounded out one after another.

A few Dong Ying's long blades reached out from all four sides at the same time, blocking Chang Geng's unparalleled sword.

The stunned monk only had time to wipe his sweat - Chang Geng's words that threatened to kill him that night were actually genuine.

Chang Geng hissed: "Move aside!"

Di Song rushed over and hurriedly explain: "Just a misunderstanding, a misunderstanding! This is the first time Mister Uekawa here came to Great Liang, he was not aware of the customs. When he saw this brother here also carried a sword, he only wanted to play around a bit. Please be kind and pardon him."

Chang Geng's reddish gaze stared at the man who had withdrawn behind the others, forcing each word out: "Play around?"

Di Song tried to smile, turning towards Gu Yun standing still as if nothing was wrong.

Seeing his completely blank face, he remembered that these top class fragrant masters could neither see nor hear, he stepped forward in an attempt to reach out to pat Gu Yun's arm.

He has yet touched the man but a fierce gust wind had instantly come from behind him. Fortunately, as his reaction was fast, otherwise it would not be guaranteed that he could keep his hand.

Chang Geng: "Do not touch him!"

Di Song: "..."

In this group of people, one couldn't hear, one couldn't speak, there's a pair of children, and the only person who could speak on their behalf, the scabbard of the weapon in his hand had not even been picked up yet.

The atmosphere was deadlocked for a moment.

At this time, Gu Yun finally opened his mouth: "Why are we still standing here? Don't miss the time of departure."

The frightening clash just now, it seemed he could not feel any of it.

Di Song quickly tried to ease the situation: "Exactly, we are all family here..."

Without waiting for him to finish, Gu Yun had already reached one hand out, Chang Geng paused for a bit then used the tip of the sword to pick up the scabbard on the ground, sliding the blade into the sheath. He then stepped over to take Gu Yun's hand and helped to lead him inside.

Liao Ran had to take care of the rest. He smiled pleasantly towards the crowd of frightened Dong Ying people. No one knew where he had taken out an old wood bead. The outside of the beads were covered with a layer of dark red paint, mimicking the look of sandalwood. After using for long time, the paint had comes off, making the beads bear the color of mottled lobular rosewood.

The monk with his clothing in the simlilar worn out state as his bead, silently recited the scriptures, praying for the crowd of people, while urging Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi to run along.

This time, the Dong Ying people were watching their backs as if they were enemies, no one had come up to greet them anymore.

Chang Geng led Gu Yun towards the quarters that they have especially prepared for the fragrant master. His nerves tensed up all

the way. Upon arrival, he carefully swept his glance outside once then locked the door: "Yi..."

Gu Yun turned back, putting a finger on his lips.

With Gu Yun's current condition, unless someone screamed at his ears, he could not hear a single word.

But judging by the rush of air around him when Chang Geng quickly turned around after closing the door to assume that the child might want to talk to him, hence he had taken the initiative to stop him beforehand.

The special medicine Gu Yun had been using was prescribed to him when he was ten years old by a highly skilled doctor among the common folk who was invited to treat him by an underling of the Old Marquis. Before that, he was forced to endure the inconvenience of his nonfunctional eyes and ears.

The old Marquis was strong-willed throughout his entire life and was extremely strict in his own self-discipline. He was tough on himself, even tougher on his son.

He did not know what the word 'pamper' was. No matter if Gu Yun could see or not, or how he felt inside - his skills must continue to be honed, the iron puppets themselves won't be lenient or hesitant because of Gu Yun's inconveniences either.

These puppets were not of the same kind that Chang Geng played with. Although the sword training puppet was terrifying, but after being specially adjusted, when crossing moves, it would stop at the right moment and would not hurt people.

When the true iron puppets started to move, they became beasts made of metal - inhumane.

He had to rely on his weak sight and hearing, combined with the surrounding flow of air to deal with them. But no matter how hard the little Gu Yun worked, he would never be able to keep up with the requirements of the Old Marquis, each time as he started to adapt to a certain level of speed and strength, they were immediately pumped

up to a higher notch.

The original words of the Old Marquis were: *Either you will learn to stand up, or else find a place to hang yourself, Gu family would rather have no heir than raise a worthless child.*

This sentence was like a cold steel nail - nailed into the bones of Gu Yun at a very young age. It could never be pulled out for the rest of his life. When Gu Yun entered the palace after the Old Marquis passed away, he still did not dare to relax for even a brief moment.

This kind of sense that has been honed for many years could always help him cover up on a few occasions. This was also the reason for why he did not wear thick clothing if it was not cold to the point that his mortal flesh could not bear.

Because thick fox fur and cotton coats would affect the sense of touch on his skin.

Gu Yun searched around for a moment in the air then wrote in Chang Geng's palm: *"The one who just fought with you was a Dong Ying's ninja. Those people excel at sneaking around. Beware of eavesdropping near the walls."*

Chang Geng lowered his head, he couldn't help but grab Gu Yun's callused hand. Letting out a deep sigh that had been hanging in his chest, he shook his head with self-deprecation – *Gu Yun would forever be calm and stable, and he would forever be frightened to death.*

Gu Yun frowned, he did not know for what reason was Chang Geng heaving such long sighs, he turned his head to *'look'* at the boy, lifting his eyebrows.

As Gu Yun was blindfolded, Chang Geng looked at him to his heart content.

Gu Yun's hand followed along his arm, moved to his head, and patted it.

Chang Geng closed his eyes, forcing himself to hold back from almost rubbing his head against the other's hand.

He took Gu Yun's hand off and wrote: *"Meeting this kind of situation in the first time following yifu, I was a bit anxious and scared."*

The most fearful thing was that brief second when the Dong Ying man's dart was about to hit Gu Yun.

Gu Yun seemed to have just remembered something and suddenly smiled.

Chang Geng: "Why are you laughing?"

"I pampered you too much." Gu Yun wrote in his palm. *"Back then, If I dare to say the word 'scared' in front of my father, I would have definitely get beaten with a stick."*

Chang Geng silently thought: *"Then why won't you ever beat me with a stick?"*

Not only did Gu Yun not beat him, but he had rarely ever gotten seriously mad at him, his anger never lasted for longer than three sentences.

The first time he faced with the sword training puppet, he was consumed with fright and unable to adapt to it, yet Gu Yun had never shown disappointment or impatience. As Chang Geng recalled it again after more than a year had passed, he felt that Gu Yun was not at all like a rigorous elder who was teaching the younger generation, but more like an adult watching a little child playing clumsily with a smile.

Gu Yun wrote: *"These Dong Ying people are very troublesome to deal with. They have many tricks up their sleeves, but not many of them can be considered to be true first-class fighters. The man's dart might have appeared terrifying, but in actuality, its flying track was curved. He simply wanted to test if I really am blind.*

"The Dong Ying people on this ship are not of concern, what I'm worried about is their destination."

Merchant ships left the inland from the passage between the sea and the canal, aiming towards the East, sending the products back to Dong Ying.

On their way, to be able to pass by several inspection stations, there must be a fragrant expert boarding along with their ships currently carrying the scented balms, the tested samples must be handed out at each of the inspection stations. Hence, no matter what the real purpose of these merchant ships was, there must always be a fragrant expert to pull the wool over other people's eyes.

After ten days of travel, Ge Ban Xiao sneaked into the Gu Yun's room: "Mar... Master Zhang, big brother Chang Geng."

After that, as he saw the blindfold on Gu Yun's face, he muttered: "Forgot that he was supposed to be deaf right now."

After greeting them, he started to bring out several objects, first was two compasses, then a box that continuously let out white steam. This plump little boy was quite amazing, his belly seemed to be retractable, it was able to store many things when sucked in, and even after taking things out... it did not seem to get thinner either.

Chang Geng: "What is this? Is there something burning inside?"

Ge Ban Xiao smiled and said: "Hehe, it is *Ziliujin*."

Chang Geng said: "Do you not feel hot?"

Ge Ban Xiao pulled open his clothes and revealed that he had a dark board on his chest. This was used for heat protection inside the heavy armor in the area that was equipped with explosives. The boy had cut it into the shape of an undergarment*: "Iron undergarment!"

**a piece of undergarment women wear under their clothes, covering their chests.*

Gu Yun took off his blindfold, put on the Liuli glass, carefully looked at Ge Ban Xiao's masterpiece, and he couldn't help but admire it. He felt that although these children didn't know anything aside from playing around, but even at such a young age, they had insisted

on going with Chang Geng to the capital. Even if they're not ones with grand ambitions, they certainly still have their own talents.

Ge Ban Xiao used the monk's sign language: "Who said that only women can wear undergarment?"

Gu Yun gave him a thumbs up – *You're completely right.*

Chang Geng: "..."

On the table, the two compasses were spinning in a frenzy. Ge Ban Xiao gestured for the two of them to look, then gently tapped the table and put up three fingers - *The compasses had been messed up for at least three days.*

Gu Yun often went out - he could understand it immediately at a glance.

People usually brought two compasses when traveling. If one of them would fail, the other one could be used to find out whether the first compass was broken or if there was a problem with the local area. There were certain places in the desert or on the sea where the compass could become ineffective, the general merchant and fishing ships would avoid them.

But this group of Dong Ying people, not only did they not evade, but was also deliberately going towards it. The route had no doubt deviated from the originally established destination.

'Came from the ground, going to Hao Li,' what exactly did this 'Hao Li' mean?

Ge Ban Xiao: "Fortunately, I also brought this."

He spoke while opening the small box that had been spurting out white steam. It was a very delicate little thing, there was a fast-moving small wheel in the middle, connected with a shaft, the outer had several shining golden rings. The word 'Ling' was inscribed in the corner, revealing that it was a product of Ling Shu Institute.

"This is the prototype given by Ling Shu institute. When turning, this axis will always point in one direction," Ge Ban Xiao pointed, "It

is this one - it is more accurate than the compass, but it runs on *Ziliujin*. I heard that it was rejected by people above even before the final product could come out. Master Liao Ran and I had secretly made one. Before we left, I had taken one small bowl of *Ziliujun* from big brother's sword training puppet."

Gu Yun carefully reached out to pick up the little object, feeling that it was very well crafted, he feared that he could break it if he used too much force: "If Shen Yi could see this thing, it will be enough for him to use his body to repay you."

Ge Ban Xiao pulled out a wrinkled up leather map - no one knew where he was able to obtain one, his plump and round finger danced around for a while then stopped at a certain point.

"With our current course, Master Liao Ran and I predicted that we are going to arrive at this place soon."

Chapter 32: Lin Yuan

**Lin Yuan(临渊) means 'incoming abyss' 'approaching abyss'*

—

"Gu family has nowhere to turn back to. If such a day truly arrived, this Gu has to use himself to become the fuel to sacrifice for the homeland of his ancestors."

—

It was a map of various small islands in the Eastern Sea. But the image was very unclear, appearing like droplets of inks that were scattered on the page.

Gu Yun held the layout of entire Great Liang in his heart, but he didn't remember such a place existed. There was no decent steam lamp on the merchant ship, the indoor oil lamp was dim, even if he put on the Liuli glass, it was still very difficult to see. He wrinkled his brows and tried to brighten the oil lamp.

Ge Ban Xiao: "This is a map that master Liao Ran gave me. I saw that there is no such place on the map of the Ministry of War. They are generally small islands that are unlivable. The surroundings are nothing but ridges of jagged rocks and turbulent streams. There are also many ghostly and haunted legends coming from it, even the locals did not know that there is an island here."

This place was far from land, it could only be reached by air travel if not by ships.

But 'Kites' were slow and relied heavily on the compass. If there was too much turbulence near the island, they simply could not approach - let alone the place to the east was basically the territory of the Dong Ying people, if 'Kite' and 'Dragon' from Great Liang continued to circle this area for no reason, it seemed quite provocative.

The maintenance of 'Eagle' was also very demanding for the

mechanics' division, it was not easy to be upheld for long. The Eastern Sea was generally used to peace and was not equipped with this type of military force.

Chang Geng couldn't help but ask: "If even the map from the Ministry of War doesn't have this area, then where did Master Liao Ran was able to find this?"

Ge Ban Xiao seriously replied: "He said that a rotten emperor from the previous dynasties loved pearls of the Eastern Sea, as the fishermen became powerless with the demanding yearly tribute, they set up a team of life-risking divers to go find them. On their travel, they accidentally hit this place, and made a map for it ."

Chang Geng: "..."

The monk's made up story could only fool silly children.

Ge Ban Xiao turned to Gu Yun and said: "Marquis sir, what should we do now?"

Gu Yun did not have time to answer when the entire hull suddenly violently trembled, Gu Yun quickly grabbed the oil lamp that was about to fall over. He made a look towards Ge Ban Xiao, signaling him to put away all the objects on the table.

Ge Ban Xiao immediately took a deep breath and sucked in his stomach, quickly hiding all the stuff inside.

Chang Geng grabbed the sword on the table: "I will go take a look."

Ge Ban Xiao: "Wait, I want to go too!"

After the two went out, Gu Yun took off his glass and set it aside, rubbing his tired eyes.

The location of the small island was very subtle. It was just crossing Dong Ying's islands but wasn't connected to Great Liang either.

It's just that even if Great Liang's naval force was weaker, it's still not something that Dong Ying people could waver. To this day, the Eastern Sea was still unable to discover a Ziliujin mine.

Great Liang was extremely strict with Ziliujin export policy. In this respect, they resembled an iron rooster, not allowing even a single feather to be plucked. If Dong Ying people wished to obtain Ziliujin in large quantities, they must either buy it from Westerners at a high price or try to get it from Great Liang's black market.

If they would choose to do business with the Westerners, they certainly would not cross by Great Liang's territory.

And about the black market...

If the culprits did not cooperate with the officials, it would not last long.

Three generations of Great Liang emperors despised Ziliujin black market that resembled a centipede with hundreds of legs, dying but not gone. As soon as the situation slightly calmed down, it was revived once again immediately.

Even if one used their toe to think, they would know that the black markets were definitely not made up of life-risking merchants from the common folk only, hidden behind it was the shadow of all forces from four sides.

Not mentioning others, Gu Yun's hands were absolutely not clean, otherwise, depending solely on the Ziliujin that the court distributed to him every year, not to mention the Black Eagles, Black Armors or Black Calvary, even the dogs and the birds could not survive.

Such a large-scale smuggling of Ziliujin, the people standing behind it must not be ordinary.

At this time, the wooden door of the cabin was suddenly pushed open, Liao Ran swiftly walked in, put his hands together to greet Gu Yun as if they have already known each other for a long time, then

turned to close the door.

He had to pick up the Liuli glass that was just removed to welcome his guest.

Gu Yun could not figure it out, for what reason could Liao Ran remain confident that he would not get beaten into a pulp? Did he think it was because his face was pleasant-looking?

After bathing in the cold gaze of Gu Yun, Liao Ran still remained unaffected, he looked for a chair to sit down: "This ship will soon arrive at Hao Li later tonight. When that moment comes, this monk will follow Marshal's every order."

Gu Yun: "Pardon me for being frank - what exactly can you do? I don't lack anything used for illumination."

Liao Ran: "..."

Gu Yun slightly sat up straight, even as his eyes could no longer see clearly, the sharp threatening blades in them still remained:

"I truly did not expect it before, the hands of 'Lin Yuan' have even reached all the way to Hu Guo Temple already. Master, the two of us should openly make it clear - you people dipped your hands in this matter, in the end, what is your motive?"

The special smile on his face gradually faded, replaced with sorrowful grievances of a monk towards common civilians: "Lin Yuan Pavilion does not harbor malicious intent."

Gu Yun smiled: "Otherwise, how do you think you are still able to stay alive?"

According to legend, in one of the previous dynasties, taxes were heavy, the monarch was incompetent, the government weakened. Talented individuals from everywhere started to rise up.

The reason why Emperor Tai Zu stood out among all of them was largely due to him being chosen by the mysterious Lin Yuan Pavilion that year.

Lin Yuan Pavilion gathers all gifted people, from officials and nobles, down to small merchants and servants, countless exceptional individuals throughout the country.

At the beginning of the founding of Great Liang, Emperor Tai Zu, remembering their great support, had wanted to make a decree to grant Lin Yuan Pavilion their status. But their chieftain at the current time had thoroughly declined it. They had hidden away. From that point on, this enormous organization was once again silenced to this day.

Gu Yun: "Lin Yuan Pavilion vanished at peace and prosperity, raised up at chaos and turbulence - people said that the Black Iron Camp is a black crow, I see that you are the true crow here."

Suddenly, Liao Ran lowered his eyes, looking like a beautiful and compassionate Buddha: "The Marquis knows of my origins, yet you did not prevent me from approaching His Royal Highness."

Gu Yun silently looked at him.

Liao Ran: "This monk dares to guess, all the worries in Marshal's heart, is coincidentally similar to ours."

The ship was sailing smoothly, the oil lamp on the table shining. Gu Yun retracted his hostility, sitting at the table with his long hair scattered down. There was a faint wrinkle between his brows, it seemed as if he had taken all the seriousness he normally stepped on with the sole of his feet and placed it all on his face for once.

The two relatively made no sound, they communicated with each other only with quick gestures, but even so, they seemed to not be hindered by it at all.

Liao Ran: "Ziliujin is burning too strong, this flame is invincible, no one could stop it. Has Marshal ever thought about a way to retreat?"

Then, he did not wait for the answer but continued to say: "People all said that the Marquis of Order is a martial man - who only

ever knew how to fight, only a weapon in the hands of the emperor. But I don't see it that way. Otherwise, why is Marshal still not married? Was it only because of my brother's curse?"

Gu Yun seemed to have smiled, put away his glass, and covered his eyes with the blindfold, indicating that he did not want to communicate with Liao Ran anymore.

After all of it was done, he signed: "Gu family has nowhere to turn back to. If such a day truly arrived, this Gu will have to use himself to become the fuel to sacrifice for the homeland of his ancestors."

"Ah — right, next time you meet the doctor who had healed my eyes, say hello to him on my behalf."

From the beginning, when the first bowl of Ziliujin was dug out of the ground, it was destined that this world could never be peaceful again.

One day, the diligent farmers would eventually lose to the puppets that ran tirelessly on the fields. Even top-class fighters won't be able to resist the Heavy Armor that could annihilate an army with one sweep. Everyone would face unprecedented turmoil. In order to regain their position, they would turn out to be either extremely wealthy or extremely poor.

And the defeated in this fighting ring would have no way of turning things around again. From grand nations to every kind of civilians, everyone and everything were the same when it came to this matter.

When everyone would begin to realize this, the inevitable chaos would come, the only question left was if it would be sooner or later. This was the flow of the times, invincible heroes or prestigious rulers, no one could stop it.

After Gu Yun finished the last sentence, he reverted back to his usual calm demeanor. He no longer paid attention to the monk, walked out of the cabin with his hands behind his back, intending to

take a look at what was really happening out there that could cause the monk to run to his room to pledge his loyalty.

As soon as he stood on the deck, he could detect a strange scent coming along the sea breeze. It seemed that something was burning. Gu Yun stood at the door and carefully distinguished the scent from the wind. He came to realize that it was the strange scent when Ziliujin with impurities mixed in was burnt.

The 'merchant ship' slowly passed through the shallow water next to the small island. On both sides, there were two rows of 'Giant Dragons', these warships as bright as snow were lined up in a row, fully equipped with ammo. The merchant ships carrying the smuggled Ziliujin moved forward in a line, one after another, resembling a supply cart that ran among an army of thousands, not at all eye-catching.

Although Gu Yun couldn't see, he had already guessed what was going on from the sudden tension in the air.

With a crew of this scale, even if the Jiangnan Navy was present, they would not necessarily be able to confront them, let alone the few meager Eagle units he had brought with him.

At this time, a familiar person leaned over and silently reached out to touch him.

Except for Chang Geng, no other people did this. They either assisted him, or didn't. No one had ever gone through these much steps.

Gu Yun felt that Chang Geng always appeared to be strangely tense whenever he was in front of him. He must always make his presence known to Gu Yun first in the slightest way possible, Gu Yun would then reach out his hand for Chang Geng to assist him, if not, Chang Geng absolutely would not make any other contact.

"Silly," Gu Yun held onto Chang Geng's arm, unhappily thinking

to himself, *"What is so nerve-wracking about being with me? Does there exist in this world a kinder father than myself?"*

Chang Geng quickly wrote in his hand: *"There are at least hundreds of warships here, I am not sure if they are Giant Dragons..."*

"They are," Gu Yun replied, "I could smell the Ziliujin."

Chang Geng: "..."

Didn't Liao Ran said that human could not sense Ziliujin, that only inspection dogs could do it?

This ability of yifu... in fact, was not necessary.

Gu Yun secretly let out a sigh while complaining inside: *"This is all thanks to your house-wrecking, small-hearted big brother. Had to kick me out to the northwest distant away to be able to feel safe. Now look at this, the old turtle in the garden lotus pond is transforming into a demon and about to cook up a storm! Serves him right!"*

In the evening, the monk changed to his 'night clothes' and went to look for Gu Yun. Gu Yun had to wear Liuli glass, his ears could only hear loud movements within two feet, one eye could only barely see who was currently in the room with him. The 'soldiers' around him included a mute monk, a plump boy, a girl, and a son who had a special talent in acting spoiled.

Outside was a large crew of warships with canons and more than sufficient amount of ammo waiting readily. Plus an army of countless Eastern warriors and private soldiers.

But no one was nervous, because Gu Yun was here - he himself could represent a thousand troops.

"Don't play coy," Gu Yun said, "This 'Hao Li' place must have your people, or else why must you go through so much troubles for this? Spill it, we are now grasshoppers on the same rope."

Liao Ran silently recited a line from Buddhist scripture, then handed the 'sandalwood' beads that had lost its outer paint over. When Gu Yun reached out to recieved it, he suddenly couldn't help but wrinkle his nose. His unusually sensitive nose caught the smell of something spoiling.

Gu Yun fell back, he had never been one to be mindful about his manners when it came to monks, he bluntly said: "My God, Master, how long have you not bathed? This is getting fermented."

The three young boys immediately retreated three steps back at the same time.

Chang Geng was simply unable to recall the image of the monk the first time they met in the palace. Back then, knowing that he was about to enter the palace to meet their ruler, the monk had whole-heartedly washed himself into a little white lotus.

Gu Yun's face was as cold as ice. He was blind and deaf, the monk was a mute man - He had a strong sense of smell, the monk did not like to bathe. Of course, in this entire world, there was not a single bald donkey that didn't counteract with him.

One hundred and eight beads, unscrewing the middle of every two beads, there would be a stamp inside, a total of thirty-six stamps, each representing a member of Lin Yuan Pavilion.

Gu Yun was silent for a while: "Is Lin Yuan Pavilion going to come out of its nest?"

Liao Ran smiled and said nothing.

Chang Geng frowned and asked: "What is Lin Yuan Pavilion?"

As he suddenly spoke, Gu Yun momentarily wasn't able to tell what he said. Up until he saw Liao Ran making sign language to Chang Geng, he could then guess the dialogue between them and immediately interrupted: "They are a bunch of crow mouths - Alright, no need to explain anymore, how do we contact these people?

Liao Ran: "I'm not quite sure about the others, but I know that

one of them is a musician for their leader. We can try to contact her first."

Gu Yun thought: *"Us northwest troops of the imperial army don't have a single cicada that could sing, yet this private army even have a musician? What is justice?"*

Chang Geng: "Be careful, Dong Ying people already have their suspicion towards us. I can feel the presence of their men nearby a handful of times."

With Chang Geng taking the lead, Ge Ban Xiao also began to talk: "Marquis sir, when will our people arrive?"

Gu Yun sat quietly in one place, bearing the face of an unfathomable subject of Great Liang - in actuality, he wasn't able to hear it at all. He tried to guess based on lip-reading, but with no sign language, lip reading alone was a bit challenging.

Liao Ran quickly covered for him, he signed "Be patient, if Jiangnan Navy moved too hastily, it could affect the grander scheme of things..."

Through him, Gu Yun immediately knew Ge Ban Xiao was asking about reinforcement: "The Eagle units I brought can only be counted with one hand. There's no telling whether that good for nothing Yao Zhen can be of use or not, perhaps he can only come sweep the aftermath of the battle."

While thinking about this, he once again interrupted the master's words and said: "The Naval force of this scale is not possible to build up in just a day or two. I suspect that someone in the imperial court is conspiring to rebel. In short, this piles of metal are not our target, it is best to capture that person."

The good-hearted monk who came to his rescue was interrupted twice.

Cao Niangzi suddenly coughed, he did not say a word all this time. Ever since he saw Gu Yun's in this image with messy hair, he

was choked up every time he stood in front of the other, coincidentally becoming a convenience for the deaf man.

Cao Niangzi carefully said: "I can also help with some errands."

Gu Yun knew that this child only cared about good-looking men day and night and was very lacking in his training, he immediately refused: "No, continue to play the role of a little girl."

Cao Niangzi cautiously said: "I can dress up like a Dong Ying man."

Gu Yun raised an eyebrow.

Cao Niangzi quickly explained: "I can do it! I have even disguised as a man before!"

Gu Yun: "..."

He leaned his body forward slightly and sincerely asked: "Young man, do you know that you are a man?"

The face of Cao Niangzi instantly blushed red. His soul already swayed back and forth on the ship's towing rope, he wasn't able to even hear what Gu Yun was saying.

Gu Yun's shoulder was suddenly pulled back by force. Chang Geng wasn't afraid to touch him this time. He stood behind Gu Yun with a serious expression, as still as water, resembling that old scholar Shen Yi.

Gu Yun coughed and followed his hand to lean back, solemnly saying: "That won't work, you can't speak Dong Ying language."

As Cao Niangzi spoke up, aside from Gu Yun who could not hear right now, the others were very surprised - he had just said a very complicated sentence, mixed with a few Dong Ying words that no one knew the meaning to, the rest were stiff and accented Mandarin. Dong Ying people working on merchant ships travel on Great Liang territory years round, they could all speak Mandarin, just that their pronunciation were a bit eccentric, often mixed in words of their own

native language. Yet Cao Niangzi actually was able to replicate it flawlessly.

When Cao Niangzi finished, seeing that everyone was staring at him, he looked down and covered his face with both hands nervously.

Chang Geng asked: "Where did you learn it?"

Cao Niangzi replied in a small voice: "Listened to the two Dong Ying people who bring us food every day."

With Chang Geng's understanding of him, there was no need to ask further: one of the delivery men must have been good looking.

Thus, later that night, a slender 'Dong Ying boy' got on the small island without anyone knowing.

There were too many Dong Ying people here, as it was already late at night, no one noticed him. He shivered as he looked at rows and rows of battleships, then quickly ran.

At the same time, an uninvited guest came to find Gu Yun.

Chang Geng slightly opened the door. Di Song was standing outside, saying with a smile: "Our general heard that a fragrant master had graced our merchant ship with his presence, he had especially asked me to invite you to dinner."

Chapter 33: Clue

T/N: INTENSE

—

He spoke while slowly uncovering the blindfold on his face, his pair of eyes shining sharply like a cold shooting star, not a hint of blindness could be found in them.

—

Chang Geng calmly replied: "Wait."

He then closed the wooden door with a blank expression, leaned back against it, took a deep breath, tried to calm his nerves, and signed to Gu Yun: "Yifu, the rebellion force's leader wished to see you, what should we do?"

Ge Ban Xiao was utterly shocked, unconsciously holding his breath, and soon turned his face into an eggplant.

Gu Yun's reaction was very strange.

After Chang Geng saw him become slightly surprised, he then revealed a smile as if he had absolutely held victory in his hands, as if he had come to a mutual understanding with someone.

"This is like getting handed a pillow as soon as you're drowsy," said the Marquis of Order - who feared that the world won't be chaotic enough. "I have not seen a living rebel leader for so many years."

Ge Ban Xiao was very easily fooled, seeing that Gu Yun did not pay it any mind, he also unconsciously relaxed as if he was not about to go see the rebellion leader, but some kind of rare treasure instead.

But Chang Geng refused to listen to his fibs. His face tightened up with tension. The doubts accumulated and suppressed in his heart

all these time came out all at once, he asked again: "Where is Jiangnan's Naval forces and the Black Iron Camp?"

At this time, even as blind as Gu Yun, one can still make out the pale blue on Chang Geng's face.

Although Chang Geng did not know what 'Lin Yuan Pavilion' was, but Marshal Gu's distaste for Hu Guo Temple was well-known among all. Not mentioning other matters, if Gu Yun already had men at his disposal, for what reason must he bring Liao Ran along to be his eyesore?

Last time at Yanhui town, he still possessed the secret decree of the Emperor, allowing him to summon troops at will. This time, Gu Yun's travel to Jiangnan was purely him abandoning his duty. Being able to bring a few Eagle guards along was already more than good, where else could he find an entire troop?

And also just now, why must Gu Yun always pause for a moment before every sentence, only then rudely interrupt Liao Ran?

It might appear that he acted as such especially to pick on Liao Ran. But Chang Geng knew, although he could be a bit despicable in private, in serious matters, he absolutely would not drag his personal irritations into it.

For that brief moment, a frightening guess arose in his heart: perhaps Gu Yun had not been putting on an act at all, but he truly could not hear them. He could only read Liao Ran's sign language, only then could he deduce what others were saying?

With this thought flashing by, Chang Geng first felt that it was all too absurd, but then, all sorts of strange details in behaviors in the past few days quickly reappeared in his mind.

First of all, Gu Yun was not a silent type of person, but during these few days, whether they were alone with just the two of them, or together with the others - Gu Yun had not 'talked' to him at all, all necessary communications were made almost through sign language only. Could the Dong Ying people be that strict about guarding them?

Secondly, why must Gu Yun use the identity of a fragrant master to mix in on this ship? There were countless ordinary fragrant experts in this world, for what reason must he insist on playing the role of a *'fragrant master'*?

When thinking about it carefully, not only did it not have much of a good effect, but it also brought a lot of trouble, the likeliness of exposing yourself was very high. Chang Geng did not believe that Gu Yun chose to do this simply just to hone his acting skills.

Thirdly, this was a minor detail, when entering Gu Yun's room, Liao Ran did not knock on the door - was it because the monk didn't understand manners and had such grand courage? Or did he know that it would be useless even if he knocked?

Chang Geng should have noticed these suspicious details from the start, but Marshal Gu had been a commander of an army for many years, he bore with him an indescribable aura, making people irrationally convinced he had everything under control. Others just needed to behave and follow his order. Just like that, Chang Geng had unknowingly overlooked a lot of unnatural behaviors.

Ge Ban Xiao noticed that Chang Geng's expression seemed different, he dumbly swept his gaze back and forth between them.

Outside, Di Song gently knocked on the door again and urged: "My general is waiting, Master Zhang please hurry."

Gu Yun patted Chang Geng's shoulder and whispered in his ear: "The Black Iron Camp is here, don't be afraid."

After that, he took out the black cloth used for blindfolding and handed it to Chang Geng, indicating Chang Geng to tie it for him.

Chang Geng took over the cloth strip, his emotions concealed, and covered Gu Yun's eyes.

In a blind spot where Gu Yun could not see, Chang Geng first shook his head to Ge Ban Xiao.

Ge Ban Xiao hadn't had time to react and understand what he meant but Chang Geng had already spoken towards him in a voice

that was neither loud nor quiet: "Yifu, if you keep being like this, I will not recognize you anymore."

Ge Ban Xiao's eyes widened: "Ah?"

Gu Yun waved his hand at their direction: "Don't talk anymore, don't leave my side as we move out there. This could also be a good opportunity for you to learn."

Ge Ban Xiao was dumbfounded by the completely off the point response.

Chang Geng's heart sunk – Gu Yun truly could not hear. He just knew that he was talking to Ge Ban Xiao by some means, then were his eyes also...

But weren't they still clear a few days ago?

Before he had time to think about it, Gu Yun had already taken the lead in pushing the door open.

Chang Geng's heart skipped a beat and he ran to help him almost in a panic. He no longer had the heart to feel shy and self-conscious about their closeness. He nervously held Gu Yun's arm with one hand, the other hand move towards the man's back, gently holding him.

Gu Yun thought that it was the sudden change that made Chang Geng uneasy, he casually patted Chang Geng's arm.

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun's behaviors appeared to look mysterious even with his own people, he couldn't tell whether his yifu was truly at ease, or if he was simply pretending to be not afraid.

Di Song was waiting at the door. Seeing Chang Geng and Ge Ban Xiao next to Gu Yun, he smiled. "Master Zhang please come this way. Oh? The young lady and the other master is not with us today?"

"Our young lady was feeling under the weather, the master had stayed behind to take care of her," Chang Geng swept him with a

glance, he was focusing all the energy on Gu Yun, but also took the time to smile and said: "Why, the general wants us all to be present for him to be able to check thoroughly?"

Di Song politely replied: "What is the young master saying?"

This was originally an assortment of desolate islands, scattered on the surface of the Eastern Sea. For the biggest one among them, it could only take a single day to walk around it. The smaller ones were only about one-acre square. Battleships were docked all over, connected to each other by metal chains that let out white steam. From a distance, they appeared like a city floating over the sea.

While walking, Chang Geng wrote a brief description of their surroundings on Gu Yun's palm. At the same time, the teenager couldn't help but have one question - the location of this small island was indeed very discreet. Once they brought their smuggled *Ziliujin* here, it would not be easily uncovered. But this place was about to become a fairyland already, was the Jiangnan Navy all dead?

Or perhaps Jiangnan Navy already had their men mixed into it?

Just as his thoughts were about to run astray, Di Song who was leading the way suddenly stopped.

A group of people who appeared like dancers swiftly passed in front of them with light footsteps, walking on the long ropeway. Combined with the surrounding white steam, they resembled a group of fairies.

The woman leading them was dressed in white, holding a musical instrument in her arms, stopping to pay her respect as she saw Di Song. She couldn't be said to be beautiful, her facial features were faint, seeming as if they were hidden behind a layer of yarn. From top to bottom, there was no part of her that stood out much. She was pleasant-looking, but as soon as she turned away, it was difficult for one to remember what she looked like.

Di Song: "I don't dare, Miss Chen, please go ahead first. Don't let the General wait for long."

The woman did not refuse. She nodded her head, bowed down again and drifted away, the scent of tranquilizer filling the air.

Chang Geng saw Gu Yun's lips slightly curved up, showing a smile.

At the same time, Cao Niangzi who was disguised as a Dong Ying boy ran all the way to a very discreet boat. The guard was sleeping. Cao Niangzi put his hands behind his back, holding an iron rod, then slowly approached him.

His figure was small and slim, his hands and feet seemed to also be quicker than others. Even as he came close to the guard, the other party had not responded. Cao Niangzi used the moonlight by the sea to look at the man who was snoring. Seeing that his drool was about to reach his neck already, Cao Niangzi immediately felt relieved and thought to himself: *"How unsightly."*

The sea waves softly swept by, the boat trembled slightly, the guard rolled over, almost falling off his wooden chair. He woke up and was shocked to find that there was someone next to him. The guard turned and sat up, looking at a young Dong Ying teenager who was using their language to greet him.

The guard relaxed and rubbed his eyes, as he was about to get a clearer look at the person in front of him, Cao Niangzi had already swung the rod at the back of his head.

The guard fell down without a sound.

The culprit patted his own chest and whispered: "Scared me to death, scared me to death..."

Cao Niangzi was frightened yet his hands remained quick. He swiftly took the keys from the guard's waist and turned into the cabin. Just as the person who instructed him to come here had described, there was indeed a prison cell, there were about twenty or

thirty people who appeared to be craftsmen inside. Upon seeing Cao Niangzi appear, they cried out in a low voice: "The enemy came!"

"Shh--" Cao Niangzi whispered, then bluffing himself up to the cloud. "I am not a Dong Ying person. I have been brought here by the Marquis of Order to ease the rebellion. Let me first release you all."

Deeper into the night, there was a layer of light fog hanging over the sea waves.

Liao Ran and a man dressed in black quickly got into a cabin on a ship, dozens of steel armor were neatly arranged inside.

Liao Ran retrieved a bottle from his bag, turned and threw it to his companion. The two exchanged a look with each other and began to pour fish ink on the steel armors.

Di Song was taking Gu Yun and the others to an ordinary looking ship.

The ropeway had not yet reached the end, but they could already faintly hear the laughter and music inside the quarter. Just as Di Song stepped onto the deck, it happened.

There was a roar that Chang Geng was all too familiar with ringing out from a corner. Then, white steam exploded, and an iron puppet hidden in the darkness surged out and swung its blade at Gu Yun.

Even Di Song was caught off guard, he immediately screamed and fell flat on the ground.

Chang Geng instinctively drew his sword, but someone had

pushed his hand back, retracted the blade back to the scabbard.

In the next moment, his arm was empty, Gu Yun with inconvenient eyes and ears turned to slip by the puppet. His movements seemed almost relaxed, the tip of his foot carelessly tapped on the shoulder of the monster, for a brief moment, the blade in its hand shone a thin bright line on his face.

Chang Geng's pupil shrunk - *Hold on, wasn't he blindfolded and he could not hear?*

The shine vanished after a fleeting second. The next moment, Gu Yun disappeared behind the puppet, a dreadful scream pierced through the night, then abruptly stopped.

Di Song trembled greatly.

The puppet's movement was stopped in its tracks, hanging in the air. Then, the body of a Dong Ying man was thrown out. Gu Yun's robe flew with the sea breeze. He stood on the deck, holding the dagger of the Dong Ying man in his hand, he suddenly took out a handkerchief and wiped the blade off with distaste. Then without a care, he slightly lifted his head and put one hand out.

Chang Geng's throat moved, his heart was beating like a drum, immediately stepping forward to hold him.

Gu Yun said: "If this is the general's sincerity, there's no need for us to come in."

Di Song was wiping the sweat dripping down his face as much as he could, he was about to open his mouth when Gu Yun directly interrupted him.

"You don't have to explain it," Gu Yun said casually. "This deaf man couldn't hear."

After finishing his words, he quickly turned to leave. At this moment, the cabin door with singing and dancing noises suddenly opened.

Two rows of private soldiers came out side by side, leaving a

passage in the middle. Chang Geng turned his head and saw a middle-aged man with no facial hair inside the cabin. He stared at Gu Yun's back and spoke up with a loud voice: "Master Zhang please stay!"

Gu Yun turned a blind eye, Chang Geng wrote in his hand: *"Their leader had come out."*

Gu Yun silently thought: "*My son, he is not the leader."*

The middle-aged man stood up and said, "I have heard of Master Zhang's grand reputation for a long time. That dog emperor possesses such talented individuals in his hands yet he did not know how to make good use of them, truly a sign that his fate is coming to its end."

The more Ge Ban Xiao listened, the more confused he became, he thought: *"Isn't 'Master Zhang' only an alias that the Marquis randomly chose? What is this 'hearing of his name for a long time'? These courteous praises of the man were too excessive."*

Gu Yun did not pay any mind, he tilted his head to ask Chang Geng: "What did he say?"

"He said he had long been looking forward to meeting you. His Majesty not making use of you was basically trying to find death." Chang Geng wrote concisely. In a brief second, he had already begun to string this chain of events together.

That's right, at first, Gu Yun was only pretending to be a fragrant master to board the ship.

The fragrant master, boatmen, and the Dong Ying ship escorts were all the same. Although they also need to pull these people to their side, at the end of the day, they remained to be minor characters. Why must their leader want to directly meet with him?

Either their identity had already been exposed, or the monk's people had someway somehow forged a false identity for Gu Yun.

Immediately, Chang Geng remembered Gu Yun's smile after a brief moment of surprise upon hearing the leader wished to meet with him. His heart sank - did he already know at that time?

After a year, he no longer had to tilt his head up to look at Gu Yun. The boy's specially made iron wristband was of course, had already become unwearable. He even felt that if Gu Yun took off all his armors, he could hug the man with one arm.

However, the long distance between them that could never be caught up was once again emerging in the heart of the young boy.

Gu Yun did not look back, he nodded indifferently .

The middle-aged man put his hand together: "Just now it was mostly because these Dong Ying people did not know their manners, but Master Zhang and I do not know each other either, seeing that your eyes and ears were inconvenienced, although I had soon received the recommendation letter, I was still ignorant to your exceptional skills. Haha, this time I truly was able to open my eyes - Qing Xu, pour Master Zhang a cup of wine to express my apology."

Chang Geng briefly conveyed the middle age man's nonsense to Gu Yun. But before he finished writing, a person from the feast had stood up. It was the woman dressed in white who they had encountered on the way here.

She poured a bowl of wine with a blank expression - not a cup, but a whole bowl.

The woman then slowly walked over, she did not say a word, handing it straight to Gu Yun.

The scent of tranquilizer combined with the scent of sea breeze grazed their noses. Although she was only a musician whose job was to be an entertainer, there was not a hint of charm or flirtation in her manners, she bore with her a certain kind of coldness and appeared somewhat distant.

Gu Yun reached out and took the wine bowl from the woman's hand and seemed to bend down slightly to sniff it.

He first revealed a smile then whispered a 'thank you'. Chang Geng didn't have time to stop him when Gu Yun had already downed the entire bowl.

The woman lowered her gaze in a down-to-earth manner, slightly bowed her body and retreated to the side. The middle-aged man laughed loudly: "Master Zhang is very carefree, I liked this kind type of straightforward people a lot."

Chang Geng was uneasy, he grabbed Gu Yun's hand and wrote in his palm: "*What if there was poison?"*

Gu Yun first assumed this was a question from that traitor. He calmly replied: "To poison a fragrant master who can neither see nor hear, you may have to work harder to find something that was odorless."

Chang Geng: "..."

Fortunately, Gu Yun's attitude was already very arrogant from the start. Although this sentence was a bit strange, it did not seem to sound out of place either.

At the same time, Chang Geng became even more and more certain that Gu Yun truly could not hear, and it was not at all an act.

Middle-aged man: "Please, please come take a seat."

This time, Chang Geng did not dare to mess around, conveying everything to Gu Yun in details.

Their group of people walked into the cabin, the cold lady then began playing the instrument.

Middle-aged man: "Fortunately for us, with such a dishonorable emperor, it had provided us with the opportunity to gather together all the talents in this world. It truly is an honor of a lifetime."

Gu Yun sneered: "Yet I feel that sitting on the same side with a group of foreign barbarians is not something to be described as 'fortunate'."

Each of his words is meant to sting, his provocative mockery seemed to accidentally further heighten his image of an exceptional genius.

The middle-aged man did not take it to heart. Obviously, for the sake of the rebellion, he had prepared to meet with all kind of freaks in this world at all cost. He only laughed and said: "One must not dwell on the minor details in order to succeed, these words of the Master was a bit unfair. Since the time when emperor Wu opened up the sea route, countless things from the foreigners had been pouring into Great Liang."

"Just the Jiangnan's farming puppets alone already had the shadow of foreign force behind it. As long as it can be done, is it important whether they are Easterners or Westerners?"

As he spoke, he started to go on a rant, listing out all types of crimes and wrongdoings from the Yuan He regency until now, his voice pained.

The people that Chang Geng and Ge Ban Xiao regularly came in contact with, if not the mysterious monk of Hu Guo temple, then it was the grand scholar that the manor had used piles of gold to invite. This was the first time they get to hear this type of talk, feeling that it was incomparably new - none of his words would be able to withstand logic, he truly just ran his mouth, talking a load of nonsense.

Gu Yun did not speak up, only sneering.

After sitting for about an incense time, he seemed to had run out of patience. He interrupted the middle-aged man and said: "This Zhang sincerely came with the intention of joining, but the Master sent out a puppet who can barely talk to entertain me just for the sake of it. Truly a disappointment."

The middle-aged man's expression instantly changed.

Gu Yun did not speak twice, he pulled Chang Geng to stand up: "If it is already like this, we shall take our leave first."

The middle-aged man called out: "Stop! Master Zhang, please stop!"

Gu Yun turned a deaf ear.

At this moment, the guards at the entrance suddenly separated to both sides, a tall and thin man donning a long coat strode in: "Master Zhang, is this Huang qualified to have a conversation with you?"

The middle-aged man quickly came next to the tall person that just arrived and said to Gu Yun: "This is our Master Huang Qiao, this matter is of utmost importance, I have to verify your identity first. Master Zhang, please forgive me."

Chang Geng frowned, feeling that the name 'Huang Qiao' was quite familiar, he was about to write it into Gu Yun's hand, but Gu Yun had gently squeezed his finger to stop him.

The one who had been deaf this whole time, was now actually able to hear this sentence himself.

"Master Huang," Gu Yun whispered: "Commander of Jiangnan Navy ... what a shock."

He spoke while slowly uncovering the blindfold on his face, his pair of eyes shining sharply like a cold shooting star, not a hint of blindness could be found in them.

He pulled his arm out of Chang Geng's hold and waved his hand to the boy whose face filled with concern, his smile appeared somewhat careless: "Hey Master Huang, that year when I followed Old General Du to be his errand boy, weren't you still an ambitious soldier? Separated for many years, do you still remember me?"

Chapter 34: Truth

—

Chang Geng rushed to catch him in fright, but as he accidentally touched his back, he found that Gu Yun's clothes felt as if he just got fished out of the water - his back has been soaked through with cold sweat.

—

Only after trying the sixth key that Cao Niangzi finally managed to open the door of the prison cell: "Hurry, Hurry out."

The people inside were already in a state of fear. As they caught sight of the rod in his hand, the group of people instantly shrunk back in fright.

In the cell, an elderly man about sixty who seemed to be their leader trembled as he spoke: "Young general, we are only Mechanics captured here by the rebellion force, we are not their followers, the young general must report this to Marquis Gu."

Cao Niangzi quickly hid the iron rod behind his back and said: "My master was fully aware of that, he still has things that need the assistance of you all."

Thus on this inconspicuous boat, a group of barefoot Mechanics supported each other out of the cell, then jumped into the sea and swam in all directions. The guard who was slowly gaining his consciousness ended up taking another hit in the face.

Cao Niangzi finished his mission, rubbing his waist and looking down at the guard - when beautiful men fainted, they appeared like a mountain of treasure that just fell down, very pitiful; how come when it was the ugly ones' turn to faint, their eyes must roll all the way back to their skull like this?

He shook his head and thought: *"How illogical."*

Then he pinched his nose and dragged the guard into the cell, locking the door. Achieving grand success, he immediately ran off.

At this time, in the cabin of the main fleet, Gu Yun, with only two teenagers beside him, stood calmly with both hands behind his back, looking at the group of fully armed private soldiers in front of him.

A person's temperament at the age of fifteen or sixteen would, of course, be far different compared to what they would become after being honed on the battlefield countless times. It might not be obvious at first glance, but as long as their appearance did not undergo drastic changes, their facial features would more or less stay the same.

As Huang Qiao heard Gu Yun spoke, he was already half-surprised, half-suspicious. After staring at him for a long while, he suddenly shuddered and took a step back: "You, you are..."

Gu Yun held the dagger taken from the Dong Ying warrior just now, casually measured its weight, then used the cloth for blindfolding to tie his hair back and smiled: "What an honor, it seems that Commander Huang still recognized me."

Huang Qiao who just now was still displaying his might, recruiting talents, in the blink of an eye, he seemed to have been struck by a spell, uncontrollably stuttering: "Gu, Gu..."

Gu Yun replied: "Mm, Gu Yun, long time no see."

A 'clang' sound rang out before he even finished - one of the private soldiers had dropped his weapon in fear. The atmosphere in the cabin was ice cold. Only the woman dressed in white playing music in the corner did not seem to pay this situation any mind, the melody continued to flow smoothly without missing a beat. The song of Jiangnan fishermen sounds particularly off in this occasion.

"Impossible!" The middle-aged man who was arrogantly running his mouth just now instinctively called out, "The Marquis of Order

was exterminating bandits in the northwest, how could..."

"You should read more if you intended to rebel," Gu Yun looked at him with all seriousness, "The Eastern Sea had never raised 'Eagles', but shouldn't you have heard of it before?"

He was not done yet but various screams suddenly sounded outside the cabin. Someone brought out the lights to get a clearer look, only to find two or three ghost-like shadows passing by outside, quickly swept by the main fleet, taking lives as they landed.

"Black Eagles! There are Black Eagles!"

"No...Impossible! Shut up!" Huang Qiao shouted. "How can there be Black Iron Camp and the Marquis of Order in the Eastern Sea?! Impossible! Shoot the arrows! Use Baihong arrows to shoot down these phony!"

"Master, be careful!"

An Eagle swept over the top of his head, arrows flying down like rain. The one who intended to start up the *Baihong* bow was forced to cover his head and run for his life in the midst of pursuit of countless arrows.

All four sides fell into chaos, the lady musician in the corner of the wall remained as steady as before, fingers gliding on the strings, changing the song to *Shi Mian Mai Fu**, very fitting for the scene.

**Ambush from ten sides,* a pipa solo piece

Huang Qiao widened his eyes: "Even if Gu Yun is here, what could he possibly do? I don't believe he can bring with him the entire Black Iron Camp far away from the desert! Kill him! Let me see who else could that dog emperor rely on!? Come forth!"

The group of soldiers drew out their weapons at once, murderously glaring at the three people being surrounded in the middle.

Ge Ban Xiao was stunned, under the cover of the music, he secretly pulled Chang Geng: "Big brother, he is right! What could we

do?"

Chang Geng didn't have time to answer, Gu Yun had already knocked on the head of Ge Ban Xiao, he calmly smiled: "Yes, I only have with me a few Eagle guards. Commander Huang is very courageous, well said!"

Ge Ban Xiao blinked: "Big brother, no, that's not right, the Marquis is very stable.

Chang Geng: "..."

A row of soldiers took out their weapons - some stepped forward, some stepped back, lining up into the formation of a sea wave. But even after moving back and forth, no one dared to come forward.

Ge Ban Xiao was already very confused, thinking to himself: *"In the end, does he have people or not?"*

Although Chang Geng did not dare to call himself smart, but he did usually think a bit deeper than Ge Ban Xiao. Unexpectedly, at this moment, he was just as confused as the other boy, he thought: *"In the end, is he deaf or not?"*

Marshal Gu who was as difficult to read as a maze laughed brightly, striding towards Huang Qiao, simply ignoring the hesitant soldiers around him: "If I remember correctly, Commander Huang's Teacher - Cheng Zhilu, seems to be an Uncle of *Wei Wang*? Why, that year when the former Emperor passed away, *Wei Wang* was not able to use the Imperial guards, now he wants to take the sea route instead?"

Chang Geng suddenly remembered - when Gu Yun took him back to the capital that year, he had brought along with him half of the Black Iron Camp, let them station outside, their swords pointed directly at the capital. When they both rushed to the palace, they had an encounter with *Wei Wang* and the Crown Prince - who was now the current Emperor - both kneeling down in front of the chamber of the Former Emperor, Gu Yun even stopped to greet him.

Thinking about it now, that greeting hid a much deeper

meaning.

Turned out, *Wei Wang* had already intended to rebel at that time, but was stopped in his track thanks to Gu Yun rushing back to the capital?

When Huang Qiao heard this, he seemed to have been struck by lightning, he immediately assumed his conspiracy had been uncovered.

Then the emperor had long noticed the ambitions of *Wei Wang*, either they have been exposed on the capital's side, or there were traitors from their own side - but this was no longer important, he only knew that Gu Yun had come, he was done for.

Of course, even in death, Huang Qiao would have never realized that Gu Yun was purely using his general impression of the relations of some of the military commanders in the imperial court, conveniently using it to his advantage.

Ge Ban Xiao eyes widen, he thought: *"What? So the Marquis was soon aware that Wei Wang wants to rebel!"*

Chang Geng's hand pressed on the sword at his waist.

Huang Qiao knew that he was already doomed, the only option left for him was to risk his life. He immediately screamed and rushed towards Gu Yun.

In the corner of the cabin, several puppets, with the purpose of decoration, screeched at the same time, roaring and raising the weapons in their hands.

Chang Geng swept from Gu's back and blocked Huang Qiao's sword before Gu Yun made a move, speaking in a low voice: "Allow me to experience the Master's martial arts skills."

With their master taking the lead, the little soldiers behind did not dare to retreat no matter how frightened they could be, rushing into the small cabin altogether.

Ge Ban Xiao hurriedly searched around himself, did not able find

anything to defend himself with, then he quickly followed suit after Gu Yun.

Gu Yun held the Dong Ying blade in front of him, casually driving back a sword swung at him. He smiled and said: "Shh, can't you all hear it?"

His unpredictable acting skills were even more incredible than the real martial art skills in his hands, everyone couldn't help but try to listen.

Chang Geng's long sword crossed the space between Huang Qiao's blade. The young boy jumped up with a blank expression, kicking at Huang Qiao's waist, he screamed, falling over at the feet of a puppet.

The iron monster could not differentiate between friends and enemies, attempting to slash anyone it could see. Huang Qiao struggled to get away.

The sound of music in the cabin had not stopped - no one knew what the woman was thinking, changing the song from *Shi Mian Mai Fu* to *Feng Qiu Huang**.

**Phoenix courtship,* another pipa solo piece

The sea waves moved lightly outside, Black Eagles roared as they flew past, Gradually, the faces of everyone changed.

They heard shouting, whistling and the beating of battle drums!

It seemed that there were thousands of troops surrounding all four sides.

Huang Qiao's heart was submerged in fear. At that moment, he couldn't help but recall the terrifying legends of the Black Iron Camp.

That year at the northern border, with endless snow blizzards, the savanna that could swallow one whole run for thousands of miles, wolves and sheep shivered in fear together, the fierce wind brought with them the ghostly army of the underworld. They wore black armors, white mists rolled behind them, breaking through the wind,

charging forward. Demons were in fear, gods were frightened...

At this time, suddenly, the light from rows of large Dragons gradually dimmed, more and more ships were powered off, there seemed to be an invincible monster in the dark, swallowing the battleships that were unable to fight back. Both the soldiers and Dong Ying warriors alike fell into a state of chaos. A large firework exploded in the air, illuminating half of the sky. Someone with sharp eyes exclaimed: "The Black Iron Camp!"

In the residual light of the fireworks, a team of soldiers donned in dark Heavy Armor have boarded the ship, the person leading them turned around, his gaze appeared to contain electricity.

Chang Geng jumped off the ground, slashing down at Huang Qiao. Ge Ban Xiao's eyes moved back and forth, he took out a small iron ball and rolled it at Huang Qiao's feet: "Big Brother, let me help you !"

The iron ball seemed to be able accelerate by itself. Rushing underneath Huang Qiao, Commander Huang's footsteps were instantly turned into disarray. Struggling to block a few slashes, Chang Geng successfully delivered a blow to his wrist, he screamed as he fell to the ground.

And the small iron ball rolled directly out of the crowd, came off the deck, made a whistling noise as it flew up, and exploded in the air.

Chang Geng twisted his hand and inserted the sword scabbard into the chest of a puppet approaching him. As soon as he pressed it, the puppet let out a few clacking sounds then stopped dead in its track.

Chang Geng: "Yifu, the traitorous leader has been restrained."

Gu Yun laughed: "The leader is still in the capital."

He then proceeded to walk out of the cabin without paying anyone any mind, but no one dared to stop him either.

Numerous Black Eagles were hovering on the deck, Gu Yun

brought out an iron plaque the size of a hand and threw it up. A Black Eagle soldier grabbed hold of it, standing on top of the high mast, he unloaded the *tong hou* equipped on the Dragon and raised his voice: "The rebellion leader has been captured, the Black Tiger Emblem is here, to all Jiangnan Naval soldiers present, if you see this, abandon the dark to come to the light, your previous wrongdoings will be pardoned, the continuing offender will be executed on the spot!"

The Black Tiger Emblem was given to the Marquis of Order by Emperor Wu. In critical moments, it could command the seven major military factions. There were three in total: one in the hands of Gu Yun, one in the imperial court, and one in the hands of the Emperor.

More than thirty Mechanics who were previously locked up have cut off the power of all the Dragons. No one was able to contact anyone. More than half of the private soldiers in the rebellion force were the Navy brought by Huang Qiao, the other was the unauthorized soldiers they recruited.

Upon hearing the Eagle soldier call for surrender, they instantly broke into a commotion. Some was stubbornly resisting, some defected on the spot. But the majority of them were at a loss for what to do. The frightened Dong Ying people had to take the initiative to act first in order to gain the upper hand, suddenly attacking comrades from their own side.

The main fleet was brightly lit, Chang Geng pushed out a tied up Huang Qiao. The rebels on the ship saw their advantage had been lost and immediately threw down their weapons.

The unaffected musician lady was still playing her instrument, she has changed through various number of songs, all of which were very well performed.

Gu Yun's face appeared calm and steady under the faint glimmer of light, Chang Geng looked at him in confusion. On one hand, he was certain that he must have been through this kind of situation many times before, on the other, he could not help but wonder where the Black Iron Camp soldiers came from.

Two or three Black Eagles were easy to hide, but can the same be said for Black Iron Camp soldiers?

Moreover, how did he manage to bring the soldiers here from the northwest desert?

Was he only pretending to be deaf? Or was he pretending to hear clearly?

For a moment, even Chang Geng couldn't help but feel that Gu Yun already knew very early on that *Wei Wang* was eyeing the Eastern Sea, he was only waiting for them to be ready for harvest all at once.

A familiar rumble came from afar, Yao Zhen had finally mobilized the Jiangnan Naval troop. Giant Dragons went out to sea, the figure of a Kite had already become visible in the distance.

Gu Yun and the Black Eagles in the sky relied on simple hand gestures to communicate. One of them received his order, carried the Black Tiger Emblem and flew towards the Kite, welcoming the troops brought by Yao Zhen.

Huang Qiao closed his eyes tight - their opportunity was gone.

The endless music finally stopped, the musician walked out of the cabin holding her instrument, glancing at Huang Qiao all tied up.

Huang Qiao glared at her and shouted: "Chen Qing Xu, even you would betray me?"

Chen Qing Xu casted him an unfathomable look and walked past him with a blank face. Her face resembled a mask - expressionless when pouring the wine, expressionless while playing music, expressionless while a fight broke out, expressionless even when being questioned.

She slowly walk towards Gu Yun and greeted: "Marquis, sir."

Gu Yun put away his arrogance from just now: "Thank you Miss Chen for your assistance, might I ask what your relation with Master Chen Zhou is..."

Chen Zhuo was the old doctor who had prescribed him his medicine many years ago.

"That is my grandfather," Chen Qing Xu then gave a suggestion. "The sea breeze is strong, The Marquis should move inside the cabin."

Gu Yun knew she was reminding him of the medicine's side effect of intense headache, he did not respond, only smiled.

Chen Qing Xu saw that he did not listen, she did not say anymore either, she lifted her dress to pay courtesy: "I pray that there shall be peace and prosperity, that people shall live for hundreds of years."

Gu Yun said again: "Thank you."

Chen Qing Xu turned to get off the ship. Perhaps already tired from playing music, she did not pay any regard to the groups of rebels currently fighting among themselves.

Ge Ban Xiao: "Oh, there are so many people at the other end, how would that sister be able to get past them?"

Gu Yun frowned, just as he was about to stop her, they saw a Dong Ying person suddenly fly forward on the ropeway, open his mouth and spit out a hidden arrow.

The Black Eagle flying up high immediately shot at his direction, and the Dong Ying man fell into the sea. Chen Qing Xu's footsteps shifted, appearing as if she was dancing with the rhythm of the ropeway. The Dong Ying's assassination arrow created a ringing sound as it collided with the metal chain, grazing past her. But her eyes had not even been lifted once, and she continued to drift away like a ghost.

Ge Ban Xiao: "..."

Of course, all kind of freaks in this world came out of Lin Yuan Pavilion.

When the Giant Kites and the Dragons arrived, the rebels had almost worn themselves out. The Eagle units kept watch of the

prisoners on the main ship, while the imperial army began to clean up the aftermath.

A Black Armor soldier rushed onto the main ship. After his protective mask was pulled up, Chang Geng was shocked to find that this person was actually Master Liao Ran.

However, the master's skill in handling the Armor was not even as adequate as the Barbarians who raided the town of Yanhui. Although he was able to achieve infinite power due to the assistance of machinery, his footstep was clunky. He was not able to properly control the amount of force, his movements resembled a large and clumsy rabbit, he barely grabbed onto the mast to stand, almost directly kneeling down.

Looking closely, the color of his 'Black Armor' was slightly fading away, revealing the white metallic color underneath, its body even carried a fishy scent.

Therefore, the 'Black Iron Camp' which had scared the rebellion force to death just now turned out to be this kind of product?

Where did the shouting come from? Created by mouth?

Chang Geng quietly ground his teeth, feeling that he had once again been deceived by Gu Yun.

Liao Ran struggled to prop up two machine arms, wanting make a few signs, but unable to control the armor well, the joints of the fingers were not able to be bent, they could only tremble like kelp, and no one was able to understand him.

He tried to sign to the point of sweating, continuing to struggle in the heavy armor.

Ge Ban Xiao said in bewilderment: "Marquis sir, the master seems to have an urgent military situation to report."

Gu Yun turned to glance at him slightly: "It's nothing, that idiot simply cannot get out, go help him unload the armor from outside."

Ge Ban Xiao: "..."

The monk who was trapped in the Heavy Armor looked at him innocently. Ge Ban Xiao took in a deep breath: "Master, are you not proficient in all kinds of steel armor?"

The monk wasn't able to speak, he couldn't manage to use sign language either. He could only use his unusually lively eyes to try to convey his thought: *Knowledgeable is not equal to mastery, a monk is not meant to be used on the battlefield.*

Ge Ban Xiao and Chang Geng together helped him to remove the Heavy Armor, Master Liao Ran rolled out, he did not even adjust his appearance but immediately came in front of Gu Yun and signed with all seriousness: "Marshal, the Jiangnan Navy has arrived, Master Yao is already on the Kite, no matter what, you should move inside the cabin to rest a while."

Chang Geng was surprised, he was able to feel something in this sentence, he suddenly turned his head and looked at Gu Yun who still remained as even-minded as before.

Gu Yun did not insist on staying either. He made a sound in agreement, observing the Dong Ying blade he had picked up before while slowly walked back. Chang Geng hurriedly catch up with him.

At this moment, the snake-like Dong Ying man used the shadow to quietly come closer to the deck, the *Xiu zhong si* inside the iron wristband showed a faint light.

The snake man revealed a distorted smile, and at the moment when Gu Yun was about to enter the cabin, his pair of iron wristbands both activated at the same time, shooting six *Xiu zhong si* towards Gu Yun.

A Black Eagle roared as he immediately flew down.

Chang Geng was taken aback and instinctively rushed forward to protect him. The force of sea breeze being cut through by the sharp weapons has already come in contact with Gu Yun.

He reached out and grabbed hold of Chang Geng, pulled him a few steps away, casting the Dong Ying blade forward . The three *Xiu*

zhong si instantly cut the blade into three parts at collision. Gu Yun flipped his hand, his wide sleeve flying, holding Chang Geng and rolled out of the way. The *Xiu zhong si* cut through the black strip of cloth tying his hair, the snake man was immediately shot dead by an Eagle unit flying above.

Gu Yun simply did not put this episode in his eyes. He patted Chang Geng and said with indifference: "Just a fish that got out of the net, it's nothing."

He leaned on Chang Geng's shoulder, intending to stand up. Who would have known that at this moment, his legs would stumble.

Chang Geng rushed to catch him in fright, but as he accidentally touched his back, he found that Gu Yun's clothes felt as if he just got fished out of the water - his back has been soaked through with cold sweat.

Chapter 35: Unease

—

He thought that he could no longer stay in the manor, or beside Gu Yun.

—

Gu Yun deliberately tried to steady his breathing, but in the end, his body would continue to tremble involuntarily after each intake of breath. Just now as he stood tall like a mast, the others weren't able to detect it. But as Chang Geng was holding him right now, he felt some kind of severe pain was about to tear its way from inside his body.

Gu Yun gently panted for a while, a hard to detect wrinkle forming between his brows. He casually smiled at Chang Geng while lying: “Now, now, just a Dong Ying person, let me pet you, no need to be scared - Don't hold me so tight."

Chang Geng: "..."

He felt pained and an urge to kill him at the same time.

Gu Yun supported himself using the scabbard of the Dong Ying blade, standing up once again. The blue blood vessels were visible from the back of his pale hand, appearing as if they could break out from under his skin.

In the bowl of wine Chen Qing Xu gave to him contained his usual medicine, Gu Yun could instantly tell with one sniff. He hesitated between ‘blind and deaf’ and ‘intense headache, but could see clearly’ — of course, the latter option was chosen.

In fact, it won't be a problem even if he did not take the medicine. After all, Gu Yun did not know in advance that the ‘musician’ of Lin Yuan Pavilion was actually the granddaughter of Doctor Chen, but when the bowl of medicine was brought in front of

him, he could not overcome the desire to regain control in his bones.

Gu Yun could admit that Shen Yi was right, he knew that one day, he must learn to live in peace with this broken body, but understanding it was one thing, Gu Yun still wasn't able to put it in practice just yet.

Even if he knew that without relying on sight and hearing, he could still live without any obstacles. Even if he understood in his heart that with any kind of illness, once accustomed to it, it would no longer be considered as an illness.

However, for this reason, the old Marquis had deprived him of his most carefree years in his childhood. Although times had passed and things had changed, this old grudge still remained difficult to fade away.

Such difficulty could slowly be resolved, and wait for time to answer it all — in fact, in the past few years, as he learned to live well together with Chang Geng, Gu Yun’s grudges against the previous generation have melted away by a lot, although he certainly would not treat Chang Geng as harshly as the old Marquis did, but he could gradually understand a father's heart of the old Marquis that time.

All hatred and resentment in the world, for the major part, could be resolved by trying to forget, the other was to put yourself in their position to strive for a mutual understanding.

Chang Geng gritted his teeth: "No."

Not only did he not let go, he even tightened his hold, sticking to him with all he had, almost appearing as if he was forcing himself closer to Gu Yun and moved inside the cabin.

Gu Yun said: "How did you invent a new way of acting spoiled?"

Chang Geng turned the other's words around as a mockery: "I was scared to death by Dong Ying people."

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng thought to himself: *"Stay calm, stay calm."*

He desperately willed himself to calm down, adjusting a relatively comfortable posture for Gu Yun.

Chang Geng frowned as he looked at Gu Yun's face. He lowered his voice and whispered: "Yifu, where do you feel uncomfortable?"

Gu Yun knew he couldn't hide it from him. He pondered for a while, then decisively chose to play a dirty trick. He beckoned Chang Geng closer with his finger.

Chang Geng earnestly came closer.

Gu Yun whispered: "Irregular periods, abdominal pain."

Chang Geng was not able to react at first: "What?"

He would only realize it after he asked. The boy's face instantly blushed red. There was no telling if it was from embarrassment or anger.

Gu Yun was currently having a splitting headache and wished nothing more than to hit his head against the wall. Seeing the easily embarrassed Chang Geng was too adorable, he laughed while trying to hold back his pain. Entertainment and enduring, he did not miss either.

Chang Geng's eyes almost appeared as if they could spurt out fire, angrily staring at him.

Gu Yun was well versed in the routine of 'must give a petting after playing a trick'. He coughed once then earnestly said: "I didn't have time to eat dinner, after drinking the bowl of cold wine from Miss Chen, my stomach was hurting a bit, it's nothing."

This sounded a bit more reasonable. But for the people who have spent years round in the army, who didn't have to experience irregular meals, one day full, one day starving?

And for ones with especially thick and sturdy skin like Grand Marshal Gu, how could he shamelessly act as if he was weak and delicate?

Chang Geng’s efforts to stay calm were completely ruined, his anger quickly blew up: “Gu Shiliu, you...”

The "you" was hanging in the air for a long time, he was unable to think of what to say next.

Gu Yun suddenly smiled, raised his hand and patted Chang Geng's head: "What, all grown up and know how to love yifu already? Your love won't be a waste."

His hand was as vast as the heaven, the flame of anger in Chang Geng’s heart was extinguished in the blink of an eye, leaving behind only an insignificant trail of smoke, evaporated in both his helplessness and powerlessness.

Chang Geng thought: *“Only God would love you, there is not a single truth from your mouth. Why must I be so distressed for nothing? He could not die anyway."*

However, Gu Yu's pained face caused him to ache as it pierced his eyes, and Chang Geng could control what he would say and what he would think, but he could not control his worry and anxiety.

After sulking for a while, he let out a sigh, turned and circled around the large chair and began to help massaging Gu Yun’s temples, his movements seemed quite professional.

Chang Geng saw that Gu Yun’s shoulder started to relax. Generally, if there was no pain in the chest and abdomen areas, the limbs could be as active as usual. He thought that a little bit of light injuries on the arm and legs would not be enough to hurt him as much. After considering it, the only answer left was a headache - Chang Geng remembered that a similar thing had happened once before when they travelled from Yanhui Town to the capital.

While pressing, he couldn't help but ridicule: "Yifu told me last time that you have migraines, did you already forget ?"

Gu Yun: "..."

He truly did forget, he had told countless lies in this life. If he remembered clearly every one of them, there was probably no space left to put anything else in.

Chang Geng: "Well?"

Gu Yun: "The headache is there as well, was it not because I have dedicated myself to Great Liang to the point of falling ill?"

Even such words could be said without blushing - Chang Geng had admited defeated, his anger completely vanished.

After Gu Yun finished talking, he used the old trick of ‘falling asleep as soon as head hits the pillow’ and enjoyed Chang Geng’s service with his eyes closed. Unfortunately, the situation outside was not yet settled. He had to keep an ear out at all times and did not dare to fall into a deep sleep.

Chang Geng had his full focus on pressing the acupuncture points for him at first, after a while, his gaze could not help but fall on Gu Yun’s face.

For those whom one was used to seeing, beautiful or unsightly didn't make much of a difference. Even with the monk’s bewitching looks, after hanging around him for a long time, he felt that he was no different from Uncle Wang of the Marquis manor — oh, Uncle Wang actually paid more attention to being clean than the monk.

Only Gu Yun was an exception.

Gu Yun’s hair tie was messed up by the Dong Ying man, he did not have time to redo it properly again, lying on his shoulders like flowing water. Chang Geng stared at him for a long time, strongly suppressing the imagery from his past dreams that involuntarily broke out of their chains and rose up in his mind. If he did not exercise restraint, those memories would further invade him, creating a long and dragged out illusion.

Every time it came to this, he would forcibly interrupt his

thoughts much like when he clashed with Bone of Impurity, and take out the meaningless verses from Buddhist scripture that Liao Ran taught him and reciting them in the bottom of his heart over and over, like using a sharpening stone grinding repeatedly against his heart.

But this trick somehow suddenly didn't work. It might be that all of Chang Geng's self-control was used up to restrain his anger, his thoughts suddenly ran astray like a horse that broke out of its rein.

The Bone of Impurity inside his body weaved for him an absurd and indescribable fantasy.

He seemed to see himself bending down and kissing Gu Yun's forehead, eyebrows, nose bridge... all the way to the lips. His lips must not be very soft, and not very sweet either, perhaps it was bitter, similar to the medicinal scent always lingering on his body, or perhaps it would taste like wine, Chang Geng even wanted to bite him.

With this idea emerging, a sweet and rusty taste of blood seemed to immediately come, lingering at his teeth and lips, Chang Geng jolted and shuddered greatly.

He came back to reality and found himself standing behind Gu Yun's chair, the tip of his tongue was bitten by himself.

In the next second, Chang Geng realized that his fingers still remained at the side of Gu Yun's head. He immediately retracted them as if it was burning hot.

He stood still in a daze for a moment, then whispered with unease: "Yifu?"

Gu Yun was sound asleep, he did not open his eyes, and he did not see the faint blood-red glint in Chang Geng's eyes either.

Chang Geng looked at him deeply then picked up his own sword and ran out of the cabin.

Outside, the sea breeze was blowing fiercely, Black Eagles were

flying close to the main ship to keep guard, and the official Jiangnan Navy was cleaning up the battleground under the command of Yao Zhen. Dong Ying people were scattered in all directions, having jumped directly into the sea, prepared to take the small boats or to swim off. The sea Dragons on four sides had already prepared a dark net in the water. In a short period of time, they had managed to catch these fishes that trapped themselves in the net.

Huang Qiao was personally brought in front of Yao Zhen. Yao Zhen appeared to be deep in thought, bending over to say something to the other.

This rushed chain of events entered Chang Geng's eyes but did not enter his mind. The burning heat on his face slowly dissipated in the sea breeze.

The cold and desolate air of the sea was like an ulcer, eating its way into his marrow, drilling into his bones, the bitter cold could cut through his flesh. Chang Geng faced the sea and scolded himself: "You are a low life animal."

He thought that he could no longer stay in the manor, or beside Gu Yun.

Two days later, at Master Yao's manor.

The peach blossoms in the courtyard had bloomed, the steam was mixed with a pleasant fragrance grazing one's face. Gu Yun sat by the window, eating melon seeds as he waited for Yao Zhen to write the report. In fear that there might be changes from the capital's side, the urgent report was already sent out first.

The capital blocked the news, but all parties have their own eyes and ears. Some words had already been leaked — they said the Emperor was furious and ordered the Imperial Guards to surround *Wei Wang*. *Wei Wang* had intended to escape from the capital at night but was caught when he made his way to De Sheng Gate. There was no information on how he was dealt with afterward.

As of right now, the dust in Jiangnan has settled, it was necessary to write another report, explaining the cause and effect to the emperor.

Yao Zhen, with his face appearing as if he was lacking sleep, put down his pen: "Marquis sir, what should we do about this?"

Gu Yun casually replied: "Just say that Master Inspector was aware of the strange occurrences at sea, secretly sending people to carefully observe, and defeating the scheme of the rebels before it could be executed."

Yao Zhen: "No, no, I am a scholar, I was air-sick while on the Kite, sea-sick while on the Dragon, nauseated throughout all the way. I do not possess the skills nor the talents. It is natural that only the Marquis can enter the enemy line and turn the tide."

Gu Yun smiled and said: "Marquis? The Marquis of Order is in the northwest, was he able to teleport? On the other hand, I heard that Master Yao was very sharp-witted, ordering the soldiers to don Black Armor, shocking the rebels and causing them to fight among themselves. Such means of carrying things out is really admirable."

Yao Zhen blurted out: "I can't do it, please don't hurt me."

Master Yao was thirty-six this year. It was the most prosperous age of a man. He grew a lively mustache and was naturally born with an intelligent and capable-appearing face; This man’s career as an official for half his life had always been met with many ups and downs, from the beginning he had glued himself to this land of plenty fishes and rice and had never achieved any grand contribution. His specialty was to sleep for an entire a day.

Thus why perhaps most people have forgotten his origin — in the 12th year of the Yuan He regency, Gu Yun’s teacher, Lin Mo Sen, who was still alive at that time, was the chief examiner of the imperial examination session. When coming across the essay of Yao Zhen, he couldn’t help himself from slapping the desk in praises. He had presented it to Emperor Yuan He, and His Majesty had personally assigned him as a *Zhuang Yuan**.

**A title for the one with the highest score in the imperial examination.*

Gu Yun said with deeper meaning: "Eased the Eastern sea rebellion, eliminated a big battle that may endanger the areas of utmost importance, you don't need even such a large credit? In the future, you will be ready to enter the world with authority in your hands."

Yao Zhen smiled bitterly: "What type of talents received that type of wage? I have no talent and no virtue, I only hope to find a good place for retirement down the road, how can I possess the skill to turn the tides, may the Marquis please spare this lowly official."

Gu Yun: "I even want to report to His Majesty to send you to the northwest to be a supervisor for the army."

Yao Zhen held his head and said: "I still have an elderly mother over eighty and young children waiting to be fed. I ask the hero to spare this dog's life. You can take whatever objects you please from my household instead."

Gu Yun: "..."

"Marquis sir, how about this, as this matter happened here. The Governor of Liang Jiang* - Master Zhou - definitely won't be able to avoid getting involved. I should go discuss it with him."

**Liang Jiang is referring to both Jiangnan and Jiangxi*

Yao Zhen smiled apologetically, seeing the expression on Gu Yun's face was not very good, he quickly added a sentence, "That's right, there is also the young Prince. His Highness traveled to Jiangnan and accidentally came across the rebel force capturing Mechanics. Witnessing such wrongdoings, he had sneaked into their base alone, assisting our forces from the inside, and personally caught their leader. You see, does this sound alright?"

Hearing these words, Gu Yun did not say anything anymore.

For Chang Geng's origin, although His Majesty did not express

his opinion outright, it was certain that he would bear some sort of ill-feeling. Now that this matter involved *Wei Wang*, His Majesty must have felt greatly disappointed. If he then looked at the unwelcomed younger brother who was now clearly standing on his side, maybe he would be willing to let go of the grudges of the older generation.

Chang Geng was closely reaching the age of inheriting his royal status. If he could obtain His Majesty's favor, it would perhaps be better for his future.

Gu Yun weighed this option a moment then glared at Yao Zhen in frustration. This person was indeed very talented. Otherwise, it would be difficult for him to maintain a long-term friendship with the Marquis of Order after having the chance to only meet with him once, but it was also true that he was not seeking to further himself. All he strived for in life was to be able to eat and sleep, pouring all his intelligence into sugarcoating others.

Yao Zhen smiled and asked again: "Marquis sir, what do you think?"

Gu Yun was too lazy to pay him any mind, rolled his eyes, and walked away.

He had intended to quietly leave Jiangnan. In this matter, both Lin Yuan Pavilion and the Black Iron Camp had put in efforts, but it was inconvenient for both sides to make their appearance known. How to dress this up nicely, they could only rely on Yao Zhen's pen.

When Gu Yun pushed open the door, he saw Chang Geng was currently making a bamboo flute in the courtyard. Ge Ban Xiao, Cao Niangzi, and Master Yao’s two little daughters gathered around him. Chang Geng was handy, gentle and patient, making a flute for each one of them. His craft looked quite decent, the two little girls who were not yet ten years old were cheering and jumping around him.

Gu Yun was in a good mood again as he saw Chang Geng. Although he never said it out loud, he always hoped that Chang Geng would grow into an intelligent and sharp young man, but would not outwardly show it, righteous and benevolent yet not lacking resolute,

not as weak minded as his father, but not as extreme as his mother.

The person Chang Geng grew up to be is exactly what he had wished for.

Even his appearance had chosen the advantageous points of his parents to inherit.

He walked over and took the flute that was only just beginning to take shape out of Chang Geng's hand and smiled: "Is there one for me?"

Chang Geng’s relaxed smile on his face disappeared. He took the flute back and handed it to the little girl who was eagerly waiting on the side: “Just a little plaything for young children, the craftsmanship is rough and ugly. Yifu, please don't make fun of me.”

Gu Yun: "..."

He stared silently at the flute on the hand of the little girl, thinking: *"I want it."*

The child who was not even as tall as Gu Yun’s legs hid her hands behind her back and looked up at him intently.

Chang Geng put down the things in his hands and gestured to Ge Ban Xiao to take the two little girls somewhere else to play, he himself stood up and followed after Gu Yun: "Is yifu going back to the Western Regions?"

Gu Yun: "Mm, you go back to the capital to meet with His Majesty, Chong Ze will teach you all that you need to say, don't worry."

Chang Geng nodded silently.

"This time you have achieved a merit, the emperor may even have a reward for you," Gu Yun said. "He may allow you to come to the court to listen to political matters. If you mention it, he might even let you come to the northwest to find me."

After meeting with Chang Geng again this year, he had already grown into a mature young man who did not faze while in the face of danger. His childishness from last year was gone. Gu Yun had grown more lenient to the idea of taking him to the northwest.

The current situation there could be considered to be peaceful as of this moment. Gu Yun thought he could take Chang Geng along for him to learn new things. After all, even without doing anything, after returning to the capital, Chang Geng would still be able to count this credit as his own.

When Gu Yun left home, Chang Geng had wished nothing more than to go to the northwest with him. Gu Yun thought that now as he would finally get what he wanted, at least he would be happy and excited.

Unexpectedly, Chang Geng stopped his footsteps, he was silent for a moment then said: "Yifu, I don't want to go to the Western Regions anymore."

Chapter 36: Separation

T/N: This one was by far the hardest to translate because I cannot bear to look at them fighting like this.

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This kid actually learned how to talk back!

—

Gu Yun was startled, this was completely different from what he had expected: "Why?"

Chang Geng responded with reason: "The Western Regions is already being keep guarded of by yifu's Black Iron Camp, me being there would only cause more troubles, moreover, I'm also bothering you to forge for me a false military merit, without any meaning."

Although this was also Gu Yun's intention, but with Chang Geng uncovering it directly as such, he still felt as if he was being splashed with cold water. He could barely keep his expression unchanged and said: "Then... that is alright as well, going back to the capital to listen to politics is also good. My old teacher has some other students, you could go make them acquaintance in advance..."

Chang Geng: "Isn't that just the same?"

While talking, he looked up at the ending of the narrow hallway, Jiangnan's bright golden sunlight was shining down the garden full of countless spring flowers blooming. However, listening to servants from Yao Manor - although the flowers appeared energetic now, in fact, the blooming period only lasted for about ten days to a half month, it will not be long before they wilted away.

Fortunately as they bloomed here in the garden, if they were to grow in a desolated mountain, they could only quietly show their beauty, then quietly wither to the ground, life and death separated

only by the blink of an eye, surrounded by only a few mindless birds and animals: who would be there to understand?

Flowers were like this, and so were the many unnecessary love and hate emotions in one's heart.

Chang Geng: "Yifu, there are a lot of gifted individuals around Master Liao Ran. I wish to travel with them, I will not delay my reading process and training..."

What is this nonsense?

Before he could even finish, Gu Yun had already interrupted him, his expression darkened: "No."

Chang Geng turned and looked at him silently.

Hidden in the eyes of the juvenile standing with his back against the light were unexplainable things that Gu Yun had never noticed before. At this time, as he caught sight of it, he was slightly taken aback.

He immediately realized that his tone of voice just now was a bit harsh, he softened his expression and said, "If you want to go out to play, wait after you have returned to the capital, ask Uncle Wang to arrange a few guards from the manor to accompany you around. But there is one thing, you are not allowed to go to any place where there is no imperial station. Every time you arrive at a station, you must send me a letter to report of your safety."

Chang Geng said faintly: "Eat well and dress well throughout all the way as such, it would only be all the more embarrassing, would it not? If so, then I might as well go offer incense at Hu Guo temple together with young misses and madams, it would save more money and effort that way."

Gu Yun: "..."

This kid actually learned how to talk back!

He also topped it up with flowery and well-hidden sarcasm!

Gu Yun's good mood from Jiangnan's beautiful springtime scenery had dissipated. He thought: *"How can he still not listen, was it because I pampered him too much?"*

His tone began to sound impatient: "The land is vast, the people are wicked, what fun is there to have? That monk can't fend for himself, except for running away, he could only ask for food. If something were to happen to you on your travel with him, what am I supposed to explain to the Former Emperor?"

"Ah," Chang Geng thought indifferently. "*It really is because of having to explain to the former emperor. If he knew that I was only a little bastard child no one knew where Xiu Niang got from and used to confuse the royal lineage, he would be furious to the point of coming back to life to kill me."*

Every time he looked at Gu Yun, he felt that his heart was cut by a knife, his sin growing larger and heavier, he wished nothing more than to immediately flee. But the other man had firmly held him back and refused to let go.

Unknown to Gu Yun, for a short period of time, Chang Geng's heart even gave birth to an irrational and lingering hatred towards him, but fortunately, he had quickly come back to his senses.

Chang Geng retracted his eyes from Gu Yun and said calmly: "Yifu had told me a few days ago, whatever path I may choose, it would be alright as long as it is the path I want for myself. It's only been a few days yet you have taken back your words?"

Gu Yun's heart burst into flames: "I said I want you to think it through carefully for yourself, you call this 'thinking carefully'?"

Chang Geng: "I truly think so."

"No, think again! Find me after you have thought about it carefully." Gu Yun did not want to scold him outside, only angrily turning to leave.

Chang Geng watched his retreating figure, brushing off the petals on his shoulder. There were sounds of footsteps coming from behind

him, he could tell who it was even without turning: "For the Master to witness such a scene, how embarrassing."

At the beginning, the monk did not dare to appear. After poking his head in and out for a long time, seeing that Gu Yun had left, he finally showed his face with relief, he signed: "The Marquis bears good intentions."

Chang Geng looked down at his hands, they were already covered in a thin layer of callus, but they had not yet been honed by scars.

He said indifferently: "I don't want to become an incompetent being who could only rely on his kindness."

"This monk felt that Your Highness was a bit extreme," he said. "Even if one was god himself, at a young age, most people must grow up under the guidance and protection of their parents. With Your Highness' standard, wouldn't it mean everyone in this world is incompetent? Grand talents bloomed late, and need to avoid turning arrogant."

Chang Geng did not answer, of course, he did not put it in mind.

The monk said: "I saw the look on Your Highness's face, the poison must have already eaten its way to your bones."

Chang Geng was shocked; he first assumed the man had found out about the Bone of Impurity in him.

However, the monk continued to say: "There are poisons in the hearts of all people, some heavy, some light, and the age of His Highness, it should not have acted up as such, you have been thinking too much."

Chang Geng smiled sadly: "What do you know?"

He always felt that everything around him— royal status, false identity,... were all stolen for him by Xiu Niang. One day, someone would realize he was not deserving of them, they would reveal the truth, and he would lose everything.

Unease and anxiety had become a habit, thus Chang Geng always felt that in this capital, he was only an outsider.

Gu Yun standing in the position of the Fourth Prince to plan his future for him, yet Chang Geng found that he wasn't able to put his heart into it.

Every day, looking in the mirror, he knew that he was an 'earthy dragon*' rolling in the mud. But others must place onto him horns and scales, trying their best to dress him up as a true dragon. But even with more decorations, in the end, he remained to be a worm, who could never reach the rank of nobility.

**another way to call the worms*.

In this case, it was better to distance himself away now, to prevent any future embarrassment.

Only Gu Yun, all the joys and sorrows the man had brought to him were immensely unforgettable, engraving into his bones, not a single hint of insincerity. He could not deceive himself and say that he would be able to let go of him easily, just that he often felt he was not worthy.

Chang Geng did not reprimand himself for too long, he soon gathered himself together again and asked: "Ah yes, Master, I have always wanted to ask you, in the end, the illness that my yifu had, what exactly is it? His behavior on the trip to the Eastern Sea was very strange, but he had refused to tell me."

The monk hurriedly shook his head: "Amitabha, this monk does not dare to discuss it."

Chang Geng frowned. "Him displaying his might was one thing, even you would help him?"

"The Marquis is not the kind to display his might for no reason." He smiled. "If he does not want to mention this matter, it is not because he was afraid that others will know of his weaknesses, but perhaps because this is the ingrown scale on his body and the poison in his heart — who would dare to touch the Marquis of Order's

sensitive matter? Your Highness, please spare this monk's life."

Chang Geng frowned in thought.

It was not easy for Gu Yun to escape from the golden sand of the desert, for these few days, he had intended to go take a good look at the sceneries of Jiangnan, go for a horse ride, go for a boat ride on the lake, admire a few beautiful ladies. In short, he had intended to play to his heart's content before leaving.

But in the end, two sentences from Chang Geng had killed off his mood, he ended up staying put in his room, not willing to take even one step outside. Because looking at Chang Geng was enough to make him angry, same for Yao Zhen, he was even more furious looking at Liao Ran.

The two rascals of Yao's family still refused to stop, loudly blowing on the flute one after another, like a pair of noisy parrots.

As Gu Yun listened to these off-tone notes, he remembered how Chang Geng took the flute right out of his hand and became even angrier. Didn't he use to save everything for yifu before? How did he change this quickly?

How pitiful were the fates of parents and their children — seemed to be connected by blood, but did not last long in the end.

Even true families were as such, let alone strangers like them, where there were not even blood-connection.

In the evening, a Black Eagle soldier landed in the courtyard: "Grand Marshal, General Shen sent a letter."

Gu Yun supressed his rage, received the letter and took a look, only to find that it was completely different from Shen Yi's usual long talks, the letter on had three words written in it — *urgent, hurry back*.

Shen Yi, from the Lin Yuan Pavilion to facing life and death situation with him on the battlefields, there was nothing that he hadn't seen before. If there were no urgent matters, he would not

write an expedited letter to urge him.

Soldier: "Marshal, you see..."

Gu Yun: "I know, no need to reply, we will depart tomorrow."

He still hadn't resolved things with Chang Geng yet, Gu Yun first intended to ignore him for two days and then talk about it again, but now with Shen Yi urging him back like this, there was no other option. He walked around his room back and forth twice, then moved to find the boy.

Chang Geng was practicing his sword in the courtyard. Gu Yun stood watching him for a moment, then suddenly turned to draw out the sword of the Black Eagle soldier. The soldier still had his equipments on, the width of the heavy sword's blade was the size a grown adult's hand, Gu Yun picked it up as if it was only a feather broom: "Be careful."

His voice has not finished yet but his sword had cut through the air, sweeping by. Chang Geng firmly confronted it, not retreating for even one step.

"He had improved," Gu Yun thought. *"His hand had more strength in it now."*

He borrowed the strength of the weapon in his hand to jump up, his sword created a circle resembling a full moon.

Chang Geng did not dare to confront him directly, immediately taking a few steps back. He wasn't able to disperse the force in this move, the heavy sword in Gu Yun's resembled a ghost-like snake, sending out three slashes in the blink of an eye. Chang Geng crossed his sword in front of his chest to block the attack, his footsteps had been forced to back into corner. He turned to jump onto the pillar, flipping in the air, and stepping on Gu Yun's sword with one leg.

Gu Yun said a praise, then suddenly loosened his hold on the hilt. Chang Geng's foot suddenly lost its support, becoming unsteady. Gu Yun then stretched out, grabbing the hilt again and gently pressing onto the shoulder of the boy who have yet to find his

footing, the blade's dark hue caused his goosebumps to raise up all at once.

Gu Yun smiled, patted Chang Geng's shoulder with the sword, then threw it back to the soldier behind him: "Not bad, you have not been slacking off in your training."

Chang Geng rubbed his slightly numb wrist: "It is still far worse compared to yifu."

Gu Yun said: "Mm, truly is far worse."

Chang Geng: "..."

Under normal circumstances, shouldn't you first say a few words of praises and then give a few pointers? He even used it to show off instead! Could there be such a modest yifu?

Gu Yun: "If you come to the Northwest Camp, I can teach you personally."

Sure enough, it was about this subject again, Chang Geng could not help but laugh.

It was strange that sometimes, when a person truly wanted something, they would try all methods, risking their everything in order to get it, but as they suddenly felt that they no longer want it, it would come to find them directly at their door instead.

Chang Geng gently refused: "Back then at the Marquis manor, I had asked my instructor, when you were young, you have practiced swordsmanship and martial arts here in this manor as well, how were you able to become so powerful?

"The instructor told me, solid skills mainly depended on how much effort one is willing to put in training. But to become powerful, it was mainly because one had gone through many life and death encounters on the battlefield, who taught them was not of importance."

Gu Yun's smile disappeared.

Chang Geng: "Yifu, I have thought about it carefully, I still wish to go out and see the world."

Gu Yu frowned: "Is the heaven and earth of the capital and the heavens and earth of the frontiers not the same? What more do you want to see, Great Liang isn't enough for you anymore? Do you want to swim to the Western countries as well?"

These two father and son were about to fight again - the Black Eagle soldier stood quietly at the back, not daring to make any sound - the towering killer of the sky held onto his long sword, pretending to be a pile of charcoal that someone forgot to clean up.

Chang Geng didn't say anything, just looked deeply into Gu Yun's eyes. For a moment, he wished to vomit out everything he had suppressed in his heart all along, but decided against it - he tried to imagine all the possible ways Gu Yun could react to them, feeling that he would not be able to handle it.

Gu Yun: "You don't have to say anything. I don't want to know where these thoughts of yours came from. Tomorrow, tell that monk to get off, you will be going back to the capital. If you don't want to go to the northwest, then stay home, no need to go anywhere anymore!"

Chang Geng wanted to scream out loud: *"The manor is not my home."*

But as these words reached his lips, he had already bitten them in half and swallowed them down, he was instinctively afraid his words would hurt Gu Yun's heart — although he did not know if Gu Yun even had a heart to feel hurt.

"Yifu," Chang Geng said quietly. "This time I have troubled you to travel here from the northwest far away, I truly feel very saddened, but if you don't want to talk reasonably, I can only act at will. I have ran away once, I can run away for the second time. You can't keep watch over me forever, the manor's guards won't be able to hold me back."

Gu Yun was furious, his heart had always went out to the manor. No matter how much he despised the idea of returning to the capital, but as he thought about how he was finally able to come home, he had always looked forward to it greatly.

He now knew that in Chang Geng's eyes, that place was no different than a prison.

Gu Yun: "Let me see you try."

The two of them broke up unhappily once again.

The Black Eagle soldier quickly caught up to him, Gu Yun had not gone far, he was not concerned whether Chang Geng could hear him or not, he coldly said: "You don't have to follow me tomorrow, follow His Highness to the capital, do not allow him to take even one step outside!"

Soldier: "...Roger."

The city gate catching on fire and affecting the pond fishes was one thing, even the Black Eagle flying outside the gate ended up getting burned into a bald chicken, truly involving the innocents.

Early next morning, Gu Yun left in anger.

He did not talk to Chang Geng again. As he was about to leave, the immoral Marquis of Order even sneaked into the courtyard of Master Yao's five-year-old child without anyone knowing and stole the bamboo flute that was left on the swing. After the child woke up and found that the flute had disappeared out of thin air, she had sobbed all day from distress.

Gu Yun's returning speed was even faster compared to when he left, and the first sentence he said after landing was: "Prepare my medicine."

Shen Yi appeared very serious: "Can you still hear now?"

"Yes," Gu Yun said. "But it won't be for long, if there's any matter of importance, say it quickly"

Shen Yi took out a few sheets of paper: "These are the confessions of Sha Xie Zi. No other have seen them, I had personally interrogated him and waited for the Marshal to come back to decide."

Gu Yun swiftly read through them as he walked, but suddenly, his footsteps stopped in its track. He folded the papers in his hand.

For a moment, his expression seemed scary.

Sha Xie Zi invading the Silk road, in fact, was only due to route conveniences, their true target was the country of Lou Lan. It seemed they possessed in their hand a treasure map of Lou Lan — this thing called 'treasure', turned out to be a *Ziliujin* mine that ran for a thousand mile.

Shen Yi lowered his voice to ask: "Marshal, this matter is very grave, should we report it to the imperial court?"

Gu Yun quickly blurted out: "No."

He then gave a quick thought and asked Shen Yi: "Where is the map?"

Shen Yi whispered loud enough only for the two of them to hear: "Sha Xie Zi tattooed it onto his stomach."

Gu Yun: "Did he not say where he obtained it from?"

"It was stolen," said Shen Yi: "These desert bandits rampage all four sides, never fearing anyone. Great Liang people, smaller countries of the Western Regions, Western foreigners, they robbed whoever they could run into, even the bandits themselves did not know which side the map that was mixed in with their spoils came from."

Gu Yun answered with an 'Mm', narrowing his eyes that was starting to become blurry again, casting his sight towards the flourishing Lou Lan with thousands of lights in the distance. A young

Lou Lan boy was playing a one-stringed instrument on the city wall like a madman, laughing and smiling as he looked at Gu Yun's direction.

Gu Yun no longer had the heart to frolic with these Lou Lan people who only ever knew how to eat and drink. He returned the pieces of papers to Shen Yi: "Silence him."

Shen Yi's pupil contracted.

"Eliminate him and get rid of all traces," Gu Yun's lips appeared almost stilled, all his words seemed to be contained inside: "Those bandits as well, just say they wanted to escape, our force had no other choice but to slay them down — this matter between the two of us, if it were to leak out, it could only be from you. Immediately investigate the origin of that treasure map."

Shen Yi: "Roger."

He asked again moments later: "Marshal, I have heard a rumor from the capital that *Wei Wang* had been imprisoned?

Gu Yun glanced at him: "You even said yourself that it was only a rumor, the imperial decree have not been sent down yet, don't make any speculations, get to work."

Shen Yi responded with a 'yes'. The exhaustion on Gu Yun's face had not yet faded away, he stood still in one spot, pressing the corner of his eyes, he could only hope that he had overreacted about this treasure map of unknown origin.

The Dragons disaster at the Eastern Sea was not yet stabilized, the northwest already had this strange occurrence, he kept having the feeling that these events were no coincidence.

Half a month later, two reports of the Jiangnan situation were laid out in front of Long An Emperor Li Feng.

Li Feng tapped his desk, a man over forty with long beard quickly came forth, brightening up the steam lamp for him. This man

was the blood-related Uncle of His Majesty - named Wang Guo - currently the most favored subject of the imperial court.

Li Feng opened the first one - it was written according to what Gu Yun and Yao Zhen had discussed that day, sugarcoating all of Jiangnan's officials from big to small, then applauded them for their merits and goodwill at the end. The Emperor did not say anything after he finished reading, he proceeded to pick up the second one.

This one was a confidential report, the way it was written was entirely different from the previous one, it said:

"That day, the Marquis of Order, Black Eagles, Black Armors together with dozens of people have appeared at the Eastern Sea and captured the rebel leader, according to the leader's confession, there was a woman on the ship of the rebellion force, her whereabouts and actions were mysterious, she was suspected to be a member of Lin Yuan Pavilion and an old acquaintance of Gu Yun."

After Li Feng finished reading, he said nothing and handed the two reports to Wang Guo.

Wang Guo quickly went through them, he carefully assessed Li Feng's unfathomable expression, trying to guess what his thoughts might be then proceeded to speak: "This... Your Majesty, the Marquis of Order's involvement in this matter, although he had achieved a merit, but abandoning his duty at will was still quite..."

Li Feng: "He had a Black Eagle that enabled him to travel for thousands of miles, flying through all of Central Plains was only a matter of a few days. Although he left his duty, he did not particularly act out of line. Just that I am quite unsure, how could there be a coincidence such as this? What role does the Marquis of Order play in all this?"

Wang Guo narrowed his eyes, he seemed to have realized something.

Li Feng's slender fingers tapped on the desk: "There was also Lin Yuan Pavilion – Lin Yuan Pavilion has hidden from the pugilist world for many years. Why did they suddenly appear? When did Gu Yun

contact these people?"

Lin Yuan Pavilion - hidden at peace and prosperity - arising in the face of chaos.

Wang Guo took a deep breath: "Your Majesty means to say...that Gu Yun harbored ulterior motives —"

Li Feng glanced at him, his lips curved up in a smile: "What is Uncle saying? Uncle Shiliu grew up with me since childhood, easing the rebellion was a grand contribution. If you think such thoughts, would it not make a loyal subject feel discouraged?"

Wang Guo did not understand what he meant, for a moment he could only play along and did not dare to answer.

Li Feng: "It's just that our homeland Great Liang stretched out for thousands of miles, from the North to the South, everything had to depend on him. Wouldn't it exhaust my Royal Uncle? I wonder, it's time to find some others to share these loads with him."

End of Volume I

Holiday break! Happy holidays :)

Volume II: Raging Wind Does Not Cease [狂风不止] | Chapter 37: The Drumming Order

T/N: Thank you for waiting (^^)

**Drumming - 击鼓 (jī gǔ), from the idiom 击鼓鸣金 (jī gǔ míng jīn) lit. to beat the drum and sound the gong, meaning to order an advance or retreat*

—

This 'scholar' was Chang Geng. After the big argument with Gu Yun four years ago, he was 'escorted' back to the capital by the Black Eagle.

—

Throughout the ages, many different dynasties and changes, immortalized in the pages of history, no emperor had ever been the same with another. Some had brought to their country peace and prosperity. Some have come to bring ruin to the country and the people. Some were only concerned about enlightenment, neglecting political matters. And some were destined to cook up a storm.

Emperor Yuan He undoubtedly belonged to the 'strive for enlightenment' category; he was forgiving and lenient, senile and incompetent. His son, although sharing similar political views with his own, his style undoubtedly belonged to the kind who would cause stormy winds and turbulence.

Long An Emperor Li Feng had never believed in 'ruling a grand nation like cooking a small fish'*. He was both diligent in political matters and a strong-minded person. Since the beginning of his ascension, he had strived to reinforce the leniency in the handling of government affairs of the previous reign.

**A sentence from Lao Zi's Tao Te Ching(The Book of the Way and of Virtue), meaning that if one meddles in too much when cooking a small fish, it will cause it to break apart. If one meddles too much in common people's affairs when ruling a country, it will cause the people to riot.*

In the first year, he sent a decree for the Marquis of Order to escort the Heavenly Wolf's Tribes' Prince Jia Lai Yinghuo back to the north. At the same time, he signed the business treaty with many nations of the Western Regions, opening up the Silk Road.

Whether it was repairing the friendship with the Man's tribes, or grounding the Marquis of Order in the Western Region, ordering him to supervise the urgent expansion of the Silk Road - these actions greatly expressed the Emperor's hatred for the national treasury gradually being hollowed out for everyone to see. It was as if he wanted to say *'If, Gu Yun, you cannot make money, then go sell yourself instead'*.

Long An's second year, *Wei Wang* colluded with Dong Ying people, attempting to build his own kingdom on the sea and to set off a Dragon disaster. Unexpectedly, his conspiracy was revealed while in progress. The Jiangnan Navy captured their leader in the blink of an eye. *Wei Wang* was imprisoned, then in the end, drank poison to 'commit suicide'.

Emperor Long An had used this as an opportunity to clean up and reinforce Jiangnan officers. Eighty-six of both large and small officials were implicated, more than forty were executed, there was not enough time to slay them all at the end of fall, it needed to be separated into three parts. The others were either demoted to be a servant or exiled and would never be put to use again.

In the same year, a new law was implemented starting from Jiangnan, then was expanded out to other areas, strictly investigating the land occupied by the local landlords. However, even after the investigation was done, the lands did not get returned to the common people and the farmers but were taken back by the imperial court.

After local powers were gathered and returned to the government, up until Long An's third year, for each and every piece of land, what would be planted or built on them must go through layers of approval. The degree of centralization had surpassed even that of Emperor Wu's ruling during His time, and the restrictions on *Ziliujin* have reached an unprecedented level never seen before.

No one dared to disagree - if someone dared to, it was

undoubtedly those belonging to *Wei Wang*'s party - and would be slain at once.

Another two years passed, in Long An's fourth year, Li Feng began to implement the '*Zhang Ling* Law' - the Mechanics from the common folks must register their names at the local areas and obtain a '*Zhang Ling* badge' to be able to continue working.

According to each person's qualifications and skill level, the imperial court divided the Mechanics into five grades. There was a print under each badge, and each print was numbered. Those who possessed this badge, what they have fixed or what they have created, everything must be recorded down thoroughly.

There were firm restrictions on what type of job one was allowed to take on depending on their grade. It was strictly forbidden for unregistered Mechanics to accept jobs.

For all armors and machines related to military needs, Mechanics not belonging to the army were not allowed to get involved, in violation of this order, one will be punished by cutting off a finger and being sent to exile.

When this decree was sent down, there was a lot of controversy in the capital, but no matter how the court officials argued and what reasoning they spoke of, the Emperor and the cabinet that had undergone 'adjustment' all have one sentence in response - if they didn't tighten the Mechanics, how could they tighten the valve that was draining *Ziliujin*?

However, with this law still not finished to be argued on, Li Feng already threw out the next bomb: the 'Drumming Order' - aiming directly at the army.

According to the different functions, there were seven major military services, and a commander would be assigned in each region - Jiangnan, Zhongyuan, Saibei, Western Regions, and Nanjiang. The appointment and removal of military personnel, salary, rations, armors, and equipment will be coordinated by the Ministry of War, other matters would be handled by the commanders of the individual military regions.

The Marquis of Order with the Black Tiger Emblem in his hands could command troops everywhere in the country in case of critical situations.

Li Feng retained the layout of the five major regions and did not touch the Black Tiger Emblem in the hands of the Marquis of Order either. He only set up several supervisors in addition to the existing commanders of each region. The supervisors were directly under the Ministry of War, a new person will be changed into this position once every three years. Their job only consisted of one thing - to request for the 'Drumming Order' from the Ministry of War.

If the Drumming Order hasn't arrived, any commander who dared to deploy the troops would be treated the same as rebellion.

Except for the Black Iron Camp, all the troops stationed in five major regions were required to follow this law.

When the Drumming Order was sent down, the whole country was shocked. Who would have the heart to care about such a trivial matter like common folk Mechanics?

The Emperor and the court's officials argued noisily for a year, three out of five commanders wanted to resign. It was chaotic to the point of alarming the Marquis of Order in the northwest.

The Marquis of Order didn't have the time yet to express his opinions to His Majesty's decree that was basically trying to seek death, but he already had to travel everywhere regardless of difficulty to calm the heart of the military personnel, patiently listening to the cry of the old generals. As soon as one matter settled down, another one emerged, incredibly chaotic.

On New Year's Eve, when Gu Yun returned to the capital to report his duties, more than fifty handkerchiefs were thrown his way by young ladies and misses on the street*. He hadn't had time to feel proud when he already needed to give them back for people to wipe their tears - even diapers were less wasteful than this.

**When the troops make their way through the capital, the ladies will*

throw handkerchief towards the soldier they found to be handsome.

Even the folks became worked up along with it. All the scholars from every library throughout the country seemed as if they have nothing else in their mouths, every day repeating *this* law, *that* law, debating nonstop.

The imperial court under the rule of Emperor Yuan He that was engulfed in a heavy and silent atmosphere finally had something to talk about.

This chaos dragged on until Long An's sixth year, the debate surrounding the Drumming Order still wasn't concluded. The Emperor refused to abolish the decree, but for the time being, he did not send out any supervisor either. This decree was suspended in the air, like a hanging sword that was ready to break one of two sides at any time.

It was a cool autumn of another year, it had been four years since the disaster in Jiangnan, the bones of *Wei Wang* had turned cold, this matter became an outdated topic, and no one mentioned it anymore.

Near Sichuan's official road, there was a small tavern named 'Xinghua Village'. It was said that the most common name for a village in the whole territory of Great Liang was 'Xinghua Village'. Whenever there was a liquor store, eight out of ten places were called 'Xinghua Village'.

A young man gently lifted the curtain and entered.

He was about twenty, donning an old robe, dressed like a poor student, but he appeared very handsome, bearing with it a kind of sharpness - he has a high nose bridge as if carved out by a knife, his eyes were slightly deep resembling cold stars, yet he did not give off an aura of aggressiveness or fear-provoking but instead appeared gentle and mellow.

One's eyes would brighten as they took their first glance at him, not feeling bored even as they admired him for a long time, but instead, one could even make out a hint of distance that was hard to describe with words.

The tavern was very small, even a large dog had to bend over when entering the door, there were only two tables inside, and both were already full today.

The shopkeeper, who also worked as a waiter and a cashier, was currently playing with his abacus for the lack of better things to do. His gaze was involuntarily attracted to this young man, he silently praised *'how handsome'* then put his hands together to greet: "Customer, sir, my apologies. Coincidentally, there is no seat left, there is still another place to stay within five miles, perhaps you could check there?"

The scholar did not get angry: "I am only a little thirsty in my travel, may I trouble the shopkeeper to fill a jug of good wine for me? I don't need to sit down."

The shopkeeper took his jug, and when he opened the lid, a strong scent of wine raised up: "*Zhu Ye Qing*, very good."

A guest at the table volunteered: "This young master, please come here to rest, you can sit at my place."

The scholar did not refuse, he replied with a 'thank you'.

Still not waiting for him to sit down, he could already hear someone on the table next to him speaking: "What are you all arguing about? I think the current Emperor is very good. What is so wrong about taking control? Allow me to say a few disrespectful words: the man who did not manage anything, all day long if not fasting and reading Buddha's scripture, then it is mingling with the palace's occupants, is that a good emperor?"

The scholar didn't expect to come across people who were discussing politics even in this tavern. He looked up and saw an older man with his trousers rolled up, his hands were thick and his fingers were still stained with machine oil. It appeared that perhaps he was a

Mechanic of the lower grade.

A man who seemed to be an old farmer next to him immediately followed suit: "Isn't it? Just look at the price of rice, starting from this dynasty, have you ever seen any price that was cheaper?"

The Mechanic saw that he gained a supporter, then proceeded to run his mouth with great enthusiasm: "I went to the city the day before and heard a group of students in the library talking. When it comes to the topic of the Drumming Order, a young student was talking nonsense that the Emperor is 'weakening Great Liang's border defense forces'. It truly is just discussing strategy on papers, it's ridiculous!

"Didn't you all see *Wei Wang*'s rebellion? These commanders are a distance away from the Emperor. If they harbor any dissatisfaction, not discussing whether the land of His Majesty can be safe or not, aren't the unlucky ones who will get dragged into it not us, common folks?

"I heard people say that the with Ministry of War controlling like this, who knows how much military expense can be cut down, people do not have to pay heavy taxes anymore, is it not a good thing?"

As soon as this was said, the people in the tavern all nodded their heads in agreement, even the old man who called the scholar to sit down also opened his mouth and said: "Even the Marquis of Order himself has not jumped out to oppose it, yet the others have already boiled up in his stead."

The scholar did not pay much attention at first, but as he heard the three words 'Marquis of Order', he subconsciously looked up and asked, "What connection does this have with the Marquis of Order?"

The old man smiled and said: "This young master does not understand, this time, it might seem that the Emperor did not involve the Black Iron Camp. But in reality, he had already divided the military power in the Marquis's hands.

"Think about it, if in the future, only with the Drumming Order

can the troops of four sides be mobilized, then what about the Black Tiger Emblem in the Marquis' hands? Ones who mobilized troops without possessing the Drumming Order would be counted as an act of rebellion, then if the Ministry of War does not issue this order, will the five commanders listen to the Ministry of War, or listen to the Marquis?"

The scholar laughed: "I see, this student has learned new things."

Upon saying this, he saw that the shopkeeper had finished getting his wine, he no longer listened to the nonsense of these villagers. He thanked the elderly man who gave him his seat, laid down the money then took his leave.

Just as he exited the tavern, the place that was previously empty now had someone already waiting there, the person did not say a word either and appeared a bit embarrassed to meet with the poor scholar. He quickly paid his respects then stood on the side like a decoration.

The scholar helplessly held his forehead with his hand, thinking: *"They are catching up faster and faster."*

This 'scholar' was Chang Geng. After the big argument with Gu Yun four years ago, he was 'escorted' back to the capital by the Black Eagle.

Refusing the Emperor's many praises, Chang Geng then tried for half a year, crossing moves with the house guards every day. In the end, he finally managed to escape from the Marquis's manor.

Gu Yun had sent people to chase after him several times. The two sides painfully struggled for a whole year, Gu Yun later recognized that this child was like a young eagle that could not be restrained. He had to compromise and let Chang Geng go.

It's just that wherever Chang Geng went, he would always catch sight of a few Black Iron Camp guards in disguise following him.

Later, Chang Geng, under the recommendation of Liao Ran, became a student of a no-name expert from the common folk,

following his master to live the days of endless wandering, traveling through the entire country and places no one had set foot to before. For a time, he was able to shake off the Black Iron Camp.

However, every time he appeared near any station, he would be tailed again. He had just arrived at Sichuan but a little soldier was already waiting for him.

It's just that Chang Geng, nowadays, was no longer the same child who did not know which course to follow, stubborn and unbending. He walked his horse straight to the other person and gently said: "Troubling this brother, is my yifu alright?"

The little soldier was not very good at conversation. He did not expect Chang Geng to come over and talk to him directly, he clumsily replied: "Your Highnes-... Young master, everything is good with Master, he said that if the border situation was stabilized at the end of this year, he will come home for New Year celebration."

"Very well, then I will depart for the capital in two days." Chang Geng nodded, one could not detect whether he was feeling happy, or reluctant. He said while handed over the jug of wine that had just been filled: "This brother had traveled a long way, warm yourself up with a sip of wine."

Even if he was oblivious, the little soldier was still aware that his sudden appearance was very unwelcoming. But unexpectedly, not only did Chang Geng not get angry, he even invited him to drink. For a moment, he was completely bewildered at this warm treatment.

He didn't dare to directly touch the orifice of the jug with his lips, nervously keeping it a slight distance away as he took a sip, not daring to spill even one drop. He then returned the bottle with both hands and proceeded to walk the horse for Chang Geng.

Chang Geng: "This spring, I actually took a trip to the northwest. It was just that yifu was busy with military affairs, I did not show myself to bother him. The Silk Road was very flourishing, even the sea of endless golden sand could actually become this crowded with people. Throughout all of Great Liang, there aren't many places that could be as prosperous as that area."

The young soldier looked back and forth, seeing that there were no one around them, he whispered: "With Marshal keeping guard, in recent years, the desert bandits have gradually disappeared. Many people had settled at the entrance of the Silk Road to do business. There are all kinds of gadgets and trinkets everywhere. Marshal said that if there was anything that Your Highness may like, Marshal will bring them back for you on New Year."

Chang Geng paused, then said faintly: "I only wish for him to return."

The little soldier wasn't able to catch the deeper meaning of his words, thinking that he was only casually making a comment. Those who have been in the army for a long time were not good at flattery, thus he kept quiet.

Chang Geng maintained his usual expression as he walked along the official road of Sichuan, but his chest was getting hotter.

He soon thought that separation was much like water, splash after splash, even cinnabar garcinia or green vermiculite would eventually be washed away. But as it turned out, Gu Yun had already been carved in him. Even after washing for a long time, it could only cause the engraving to grow deeper and clearer.

Hearing that Gu Yun would be returning to the capital at the end of the year, they were only at the beginning of autumn, but Chang Geng was shocked to find that the many sentiments of one who got to return home after many years had risen up. Just then, he had blurted out the words 'ready to depart for the capital' in momentary homesickness, causing him now to feel very regretful, wishing that he could take back his words and run to escape to the ends of the earth.

As his thoughts were running astray, a fragile woman carrying someone came into view. The woman walked with difficulty, she would stop to rest after a few steps, panting hard. She let out a cry as she tripped on a rock on the side of the road then fell to the ground.

Chang Geng immediately gathered himself together, stepping forward to help both of them: "Madam, are you alright?"

There was no telling how far she had been walking for, she was already too exhausted to speak, but before she could open her mouth, tears had already dripped down first.

Chang Geng was startled for a moment, he did not ask her why she cried. He only lifted the unconscious elderly man on her back and checked the pulse on his wrist. After a moment, he gently said: "His illness was a result of not being able to move for a long time, combined with heavily suppressed anger, he will be alright after applying a few needles. His life is not in danger. If you trust me, please come with me first."

The young soldier did not expect His Highness to be knowledgeable in medicine as well, he came forward to help him carry the sick elderly man.

Chang Geng let the woman ride on his horse, while he walked and led the way. It wasn't long before they arrived at a village. There was an elegant house at its entrance, a string of bacon was hung at the door.

Chang Geng casually tied his horse, then directly pushed the door open, bringing the patient to the inner chamber, placing him on a small bed. He brought out a box of silver needles under the pillow, then rolled up his sleeves and performed acupuncture himself.

The little soldier asked: "Do you... live here?"

Chang Geng quickly looked up and smiled at him: "No, this is the place of a friend of mine..."

Before he finished talking, someone spoke up from outside: "How come you came in without invitation again."

A tall and slender woman dressed in white lifted the curtain and entered, the young soldier subconsciously turned tense - he did not notice her arrival at all, the other's skills must be above him.

Chang Geng's hands kept on working, he did not appear embarrassed either: "Miss Chen, I thought you were not at home."

This was Chen Qing Xu of Lin Yuan Pavilion on the ship from the

Eastern Sea that year.

Chapter 38: Reunion

T/N: enjoy adorable lovesick Chang Geng Y_Y

—

He hadn't seen Gu Yun for more than four years. His missing and longing had piled up into a mountain, he could not help but be frightened every time he gazed upon it, for he feared that it would collapse even with just the slightest of breeze.

—

Chen Qing Xu complained once, but there was not a trace of anger on her face. She seemed to have been long used to having uninvited guests entering her house.

She came in to set the herbs in her hands down, then paid courtesy to the strangers: "My name is Chen, I am a doctor from the pugilist world."

Although she claimed to be from the pugilist world, her mannerisms belonged to that of a lady from prestigious families. She did not smile, her expression ice-cold. The woman could not help but feel a bit rigid, she was not good at talking, after a moment, she only managed to greet back with a deep bow.

Chen Qing Xu glanced at Chang Geng, who was applying the needle and said: "He could count as being half an apprentice of mine. Resurrection is impossible, but he can handle ordinary illness just fine, this older sister please rest assured."

One could not tell her age from her appearance, yet she dressed like a young lady, the little soldier's heart was starting to beat like a drum.

His Highness had directly entered the chamber of an unmarried lady without any greetings. Even if she was a doctor...still, was it

appropriate? And with his actions seeming all too familiar, who knew how many times he had come here?

If this was the capital, in certain households which paid great attention to manners, even when husband and wife wished to meet with one another, they must send a servant to announce it first.

Although she was a woman of the pugilist world who did not pay much mind to trivial courtesy...

This was the first time the little soldier followed Chang Geng, he was constantly speculating about the relationship between this strange woman and His Royal Highness, he could not imagine how furious Gu Yun would become if he were to find out. His heart was reaching the boiling state, he wasn't able to think of the proper way to report this to Marshal, almost bringing him to tears.

During the conversation, the elderly man on the bed coughed a few times then regained consciousness.

Chang Geng did not mind the filth, taking a spittoon from the side to help him spit out.

The woman was incredibly happy, continuously expressing her endless gratitude. Chen Qing Xu gave a hand towel to Chang Geng and instructed: "You go write the prescription, I will give him a check-up."

She spoke softly, but her sentence did seem to resemble a command. Chang Geng did not oppose either, he spread the paper, pondered for a while, then wrote down the prescription.

The eyes of the little soldier almost popped out as he watched on. When he was still with Gu Yun, he has heard Marshal mentioned it more than once, that His Highness had grown up, he couldn't manage him anymore - but it was clear that he was more well-behaved compared to little children in school, not at all resembling the child that already quarreled with the Marquis at a young age.

His mind was in a mess of confusion when Chen Qing Xu had already started a conversation with the woman.

Seeing that the patient's condition has improved, the woman had become a lot more relaxed. It was only after talking that they found that this was originating from the implementation of the farming puppets project. The local people no longer had lands to do farm work, although the imperial court had issued regulations forbidding landlords to mistreat the tenants and farmers, but after a long period of time, who would still be willing to feed a group of idling bunch?

Arrears and shortfalls were also common. Those who possessed farming puppets gradually became more and more irritated. Later, farmers, mechanics, other small business owners and landlords, each divided into different factions, each felt that they were the ones at a loss, gradually becoming hostile towards the other parties.

The woman's husband had refused to sit idly at home for others to vent their anger on, he had gone to the south to find work together with his fellow countrymen. Unexpectedly, there had been no news from him since his departure.

The old father-in-law law had fallen ill, the children were still young and could not be counted on. The village doctor had soon moved away due to boredom from the lack of things to do. She now had no other choice but to carry her husband's father and travel at long distances by herself to find a different doctor.

Chen Qing Xu frowned as she heard this: "The south? The south had just undergone a big flood this year. The disaster has still not stabilized yet, how would one be able to find jobs?"

The woman was dumbfounded; having spent all her life in a mountain village, apart from the one-acre land at the front of the house, she did not know that there were other places in this world, or what this concept was.

Chang Geng, who was writing the prescription, asked her: "Was madam able to receive this year's rations that were sent down?"

Hearing this question, the woman took one look at the ill elderly man on the bed then sadly said: "To tell you the truth, we haven't. I am... I am already at this age, I don't wish to come to pick a fight at their doors. Fortunately, this year's food prices are quite low, there

are still some savings in the family, we could go out to purchase some."

Although she said this, Chang Geng knew that these people have been working as farmers for generations, they were not used to spending money. Each spending was like a knife that cut through their hearts, otherwise, why did she choose to carry her father-in-law to travel step by step and was not willing to call for a cart?

Chen Qing Xu: "Are there public properties of the imperial court? I heard when public properties finish paying to the national treasury every year, after assigning to the officials, the rest will be distributed among common people."

The woman smiled bitterly: "Our land could not be used for planting, it has been abandoned for two years."

Chang Geng: "How come? Is it due to its poor condition?"

The woman: "I heard that because it stayed near the home of an official. The district magistrate wanted to use that land to build a shrine, but for some reasons, the people above had refused him. Both sides went back and forth, in the end, no agreement was made regarding what to do with the land. It has been left empty since."

As soon as this statement came out, all three people in the room fell into silence.

"Three parts mountains and six parts rivers, they can only have one field, yet it was also being wasted like this," Chen Qing Xu sighed, "These people are truly..."

Chang Geng did not speak up, no one knew what he was thinking. He quickly wrote the prescription and handed it to Chen Qing Xu for her to check through: "Mm, this is alright - Sister please come with me, I have some common medicines here, there is no need to buy any more."

She then led the woman who was continuously expressing her gratitude to the back room for the medicine.

Seeing her leave, the young man of the Black Iron Camp immediately felt relieved and slowly came in front of Chang Geng. He did not say a word, just silently followed him, whatever Chang Geng intended to do, he would roll up his sleeves and go to do it for him first.

It only took a while for him to tidy up the pen and papers. He finally managed to let out the first sentence, his voice stiff: "Young master is very familiar with this place."

Chang Geng replied: "Mm, I often settle here whenever I travel to Sichuan."

What! A single man and a single woman!

The face of the little soldier went red, suddenly aware that his task was of utmost importance. If he did not make clear of this matter, perhaps when he returned, the Marquis would even cut him into a spittoon as well.

Chang Geng caught sight of his expression that appeared as if he had been struck with lightning, only now that he understood what he was thinking, he quickly said with a smile: "Where are your thoughts running to? This is indeed Miss Chen's house, but she is absent for most of the time. The house is usually left empty.

"Her friends from the pugilist world, whoever traveled to this area can rest here for a few days. If it happens that she is also at home, the women can stay, the men will go to find another place. This time I intended to take you here to rest for two days, but since she had come back, the two of us should go find an inn."

The little soldier's heart first felt relieved, thinking to himself: "*Ah.*"

However, before he could completely relax, he soon tensed up again. The little soldier thought sadly: *"Even though he is the Fourth Prince, he had to save a bit of inn money this way..."*

Looking at Chang Geng's old robes, the young man could not help but blurt out: "If Mar - Master knows that young master is living

days of hardship like this in the outside world, he would feel very saddened."

He wasn't good at talking, he was better in action than in words, thus as he occasionally spoke of things like this, he made them feel all the more extraordinarily sincere.

Chang Geng's heart was heavy, he momentarily could not respond.

At this time, Chen Qing Xu had finished getting the medicine for the woman, as she led her out, Chen Qing Xu glanced at Chang Geng's face and frowned: "Stay calm, what did I tell you?"

Chang Geng came back to his senses, letting out a bitter smile.

Chen Qing Xu was his half-teacher, this was true.

Two years ago, Chang Geng's teacher had found out about Bone of Impurity during one of its attacks. The secret that only he and the heaven knew of has finally had another way out.

His teacher said he was not well-versed in medicine, thus had taken him to many places, and finally, in the east, they managed to find Chen Qing Xu. It was a pity that Bone of Impurity was the secret of the Northern Witch, even Doctor Chen with her vast knowledge in medicine momentarily could not find a cure. She could only prescribe him a tranquilizer to help him stay calm as she slowly made her research.

During this period, Chang Geng had come to inquire her about Gu Yun's affairs, he used a roundabout way to ask: "Miss Chen, is there a kind of person in this world whose eyes and ears sometimes work but sometimes do not?"

Chen Qing Xu certainly knew what he meant, but it was not in her place to speak, she simply replied: "Yes."

Chang Geng asked again: "Then which type can be relieved by medication and which type cannot?"

Chen Qing Xu replied: "It is impossible if one was naturally born

with it. Damage in sight caused by injury after growing up needs to be assessed by case. It may still be possible for ones who were poisoned."

She assumed that as Chang Geng had asked in a roundabout way like this, he would next inquire directly about Gu Yun's case, but he did not. She found that she seemed to have underestimated the intelligence and sharpness of this boy.

Upon hearing this, Chang Geng only stayed silent for a long time, then in the end, begged her to accept him as her disciple.

Chen family had many generations of doctors, they paid great attention to their rules of conduct, yet did not at the same time, the family's teaching have one sentence only 'practice medicine to save lives', nothing like the eccentric 'godlike doctors' in stories, picking and choosing, only accepting patients with incurable diseases - such practice will be dismissed from the family.

She had treated serious injuries, severe illness to uncommon poisons, to children's regular cold or women with troubles in giving birth, she would happily take them in.

Of course, she did not treat her knowledge as some sort of treasure that she kept away for only herself. There was no rule that stated 'family's knowledge cannot be passed on to outsiders' either. If someone inquired, she would teach them. But Miss Chen once said she had not graduated yet, she did not dare to accept any apprentice, thus she could only be regarded to as half a teacher.

The Chen family manor was in Taiyuan. Generally, around autumn and winter seasons, Chen Qing Xu usually did not stay in the south. Chang Geng assumed as she was still in Sichuan at this time, there must be some other business. He took out his pouch, handed the young soldier some money to call a for a cart to take the woman and the elderly man back to their home.

How could the young soldier dare to accept money from the incredibly poor Fourth Prince? After refusing for a few times, he hurriedly run off.

With the outsiders having all left, Chen Qing Xu then took out a bag: "How convenient to have run into you here, this is a new tranquilizer I made, give it a try."

Chang Geng said his thanks, taking a small bit to put into his pouch then carefully put the rest away.

Chen Qing Xu accidentally caught sight of the pouch, her eyes immediately brightened up. She saw that there was no such complicated and dizzying embroidery designs such as 'mandarin ducks in the lake' or 'flying butterflies' and the likes.

There was only a layer of clean silk inside, the outside was covered by leather that had been ground into a thin and soft layer. Around its surface contained small patterns that had been engraved on by a knife, resembling the iron wristband, with many gears connected, the tip also revealed a blade, appeared as if it was about to fly out, extremely detailed and well-made.

Chen Qing Xu complimented: "Where did you get this pouch? It looks very unique."

Chang Geng: "I made it myself, do you want one?"

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

Doctor Chen who remained calm even in the face of thousand troops, at this moment, could not help but feel shocked.

"It's very durable," Chang Geng advertised. "Ah yes, I haven't asked you yet, Mid-Autumn Festival is already over, how come you are still here in Sichuan?"

"The Marquis of Order will be traveling to the south, crossing through Sichuan, he had asked to meet with me here," Chen Qing Xu said. "Why, you did not know?"

Chang Geng: "..."

The constant changing circle of fengshui, this time, the person in shock had switched.

Chang Geng only managed to find his voice again after a long while through the lingering fragrance of the tranquilizer: "No, I did not know, my yifu... why would he come to the south?"

Chen Qing Xu did not understand: "The Marquis's departure from the northwest is of course due to his military affairs. I only have this chance to say a few words to him thanks to the names of my ancestors, he would not tell me what his business might be."

Chang Geng: "But the little brother of the Black Iron Camp told me that he will return on the new year..."

Chen Qing Xu became even more confused as she heard this: "We are not reaching the Double Ninth Festival* yet, whether the Marquis returned for the new year or not, is it related to where he stays now?"

**Double Ninth Festival/Yang Festival is celebrated during the 9th day of the 9th lunar month*

Chang Geng: "..."

He was at a loss for words for a moment, then finally could not help but laugh. Thinking about it, only people who were so eager yet so afraid at the same time like himself would consider the length of three or four months as nothing.

"I assumed you came because you know of this. Turned out it was a mere coincidence," Chen Qing Xu said. "He had stated in his letter he would arrive soon during these few days. If you are not in a hurry, it would be better to wait for him, too."

Chang Geng absent-mindedly made a sound in response, his thoughts had already drifted thousands of miles away.

"Chang Geng, Chang Geng!" Chen Qing Xu came closer to his ears and called out, only then did Chang Geng finally manage to come back to his senses.

Chen Qing Xu said with all seriousness: "I have told you before if it is not the antidote itself, any other formula that helps in soothing the nerves can only serve as an aid.

"Bone of Impurity first prohibited anxiety, every straying thoughts in your heart will become the nourishment for the poison. Today, in just a short time, your mind had already scattered twice, in the end, what is going on?"

Chang Geng replied with a '*how embarrassing*', then lowered his gaze. Not wishing to dwell on this topic any further, he naturally turned the conversation towards the prescription he made just now.

He thought, Chen Qing Xu had traveled across the country, had cured countless wounds caused by blades and swords on mortal flesh, countless long-term severe illness, but could she know how to cure a person's heart?

Not long after, the Black Iron Camp's soldier who was sending the patient home had hurriedly rushed back. Seeing that Chang Geng did not disappear and leave him behind, he instantly felt relieved.

Chang Geng borrowed a few copies of 'Pharmaceutical Classics', said goodbye to Chen Qing Xu, then took the little soldier to rest in an inn from a nearby town.

The autumn cicada and insects were very lively, and with the quiet of the night, they became all the more noisy.

Chang Geng put the newly-made tranquilizer beside his pillow, feeling that Miss Chen's new medicine was not very good. Not only did it not tranquilize, but it also caused him to feel even more awake. Not being able to fall asleep, he had climbed up in the middle of the night to ignite the light and started reading.

After burning one bowl of lamp oil, finishing two and a half out of three copies of 'Pharmaceutical Classics', it had ready reached the light dawn, yet he still wasn't able to find sleep.

There seemed to be a golden box inside his chest, spurting white steam as it continued to burn a bottomless mine of *Ziliujin*.

Regardless of how Chang Geng repeatedly told himself to stay calm for tens of thousands of times in his heart, how he had intended

to treat Gu Yun who would soon arrive with a normal state of mind, even as he forced himself not to imagine how this would turn out - still, eagerness and anxiousness combined together continued to wrap themselves around his bones, every minute and every second, slashing his heart with a vine covered in sharp spikes, hurting and aching. Even deceiving himself had proven to be useless.

Early next morning, Chang Geng stopped the young soldier of the Black Iron Camp: "Little brother, usually if you want to travel to the south, crossing through Sichuan heading for the frontier, what route would you take?"

The sergeant replied: "If it was for official business, we will naturally take the official road. Other occasions can be planned as we needed for conveniences, I cannot say for certain, it is even possible to come in from the valley."

Chang Geng nodded silently.

After a short time, the little soldier was stunned to find that Chang Geng had actually changed the tattered robes he wore when traveling the pugilist world for a new set of clothes. Although it did not appear very luxurious, it was very exquisite, vaguely giving off the aura that if the wearer wasn't of nobility, they would undoubtedly be very wealthy.

Chang Geng had transformed from a poor student to a genuine young master, the innkeeper's attitude towards him could not help but become even more respectful than before.

Just like that, he donned his young master clothing and went for a horse ride on the official road every day. No one knew if he was waiting for someone, or putting on an exhibition.

The young master's clothes could not help but get dirty, when returning after a whole day, the clothing would be covered in a layer of dust. Chang Geng refused to trouble the others, he would then get to thoroughly washing them by himself. There were no other options - as there were only two sets of 'young master clothing'. If he did not work hard, there would be no other clothing to change into.

Every day as Chang Geng mounted his horse, there was always one thought in his mind: "*Perhaps I should take my leave.*"

He hadn't seen Gu Yun for more than four years. His missing and longing had piled up into a mountain, he could not help but be frightened every time he gazed upon it, for he feared that it would collapse even with just the slightest of breeze.

He wanted to run, yet he could not bear to run, everyday battling with himself inside, but before a conclusion could be made, he had already arrived at the official road. Chang Geng could only go with the flow, spending the whole day sipping the wind and eating sand circling the area, but not even a single rabbit had shown up. When he returned in the evening, there was only one thought in his mind: "*I will check out tomorrow morning then run for my life.*"

However, in the next morning, he would then take back his words and return to the official road again.

Chang Geng had been living in this madness for the past four to five days. Nearing the evening of the fifth day, as he turned his horse back to the inn, he caught sight of the sun setting in the west, dyeing the sky in a shade of blood red, stunningly beautiful. He could not help himself from slowing down his pace, letting the horse feed on the grass while walking. He recalled his actions in these past few days and found that he did not know whether to laugh or cry: *"If Liao Ran were to find out about this, perhaps he would laugh until his teeth fell off."*

At this moment, Chang Geng suddenly heard the sound of horse hooves behind him. It seemed that there was a team of riders passing by, he turned to move out of their way, but as he subconsciously looked back, there were numbers of large and strong steed that were surging forward and closing the distance in the blink of an eye, there was a carriage behind them.

From a distance, the cavalry was dressed in normal attires, appearing much like any other travelers in a rush. Yet no one knew why, Chang Geng's heart suddenly began to beat faster.

Chapter 39: Bandit Disaster

Note*: Emi's art in this chapter is not allowed to be reposted anywhere ^^ Thank you!*

—

"How sweet is this kid's mouth?" he thought helplessly. "How deadly."

—

Even with the sound of strong breeze grazing past and horseshoes slamming on the ground, Shen Yi was still able to make out that something was wrong inside the carriage. He urged his horse to catch up with Gu Yun, using one hand to cover his chest and imitating the action of being nauseated, making a signal with his eyes - *what are we going to do if that man vomits?*

Gu Yun vaguely showed a smile, clearly expressing his meaning — *serves him right, he can clean it up himself.*

The reason for Gu Yun's trip to the South was because Commander Fu Zhi Cheng's family recently had a grand funeral. General Fu's elderly mother had just passed away, he had brought forth his request to return his plaque in order to come home to attend his mother's funeral, to express his filial piety.

The 'funeral' was in fact, simply an excuse that was neither here nor there, whether one attended or not was not of importance, they could easily make up a reason not to attend, but the high ranking officials at the frontier have never done so before.

If the commander returned home for a few years, who would be responsible if war was to break out?

Moreover, in the entire Great Liang, there was no one who did not know of General Fu's background as a bandits' leader. It was the Old Marquis who had thoroughly defeated him into surrender, then was later recruited into the official military rank.

On several occasions when having an audience with His

Majesty, he had been often unable to restrain himself and let out a number of crude curse words. He was not one to pay particular attention to mannerism.

General Fu was clearly dissatisfied with the Drumming Order, combined with the floods situation in the south this year, he had chosen this opportunity as the southern front line had been lunged into horrible chaos, to abandon his duty, threatening the imperial court.

Sitting in the carriage was the personnel of the Ministry of War, Master Sun Jiao, a loyal supporter of the drumming order. The emperor sent him as an imperial supervisor, to 'appease' the subject. But unexpectedly, Master Sun had cowered in fear, expressing to His Majesty while in tears - that he had fully prepared himself to sacrifice for the country in this trip, and once he departed, there will be no return.

His Majesty had no other choice but to send a gold medal order straight to the northwest, throwing this messy state of affairs and a good-for-nothing burden to Gu Yun.

Gu Yun had spent all year round exhausting himself wiping the Emperor's behind, his temper hadn't been good, he was not able to reason with His Majesty, and could only torment Master Yao without shame.

This time as he was conveniently passing by Sichuan, Gu Yun had asked someone to write a letter to Chen Qing Xu, planning to meet with her here.

In recent years, he had become more and more aware of the decrease in effectiveness of the medicine the old Doctor Chen prescribed to him in the past. Before, one dose would be able to get him through four to five days, but as of right now, it had come to the point where he had to take his medicine every other day.

When moving on the official road, Gu Yun had noticed from a distance away, there was a young man walking his horse on the roadside. He did not pay attention at the beginning, but just when he passed by, he accidentally caught sight of the young man, catching

the other's gaze just in time.

It was only a glimpse. Gu Yun's godlike steed had already surged forward a great distance, he did not have time to react when he had instinctively pulled on the reins.

The horse let out a long neigh, its front hooves leaped up high then landed back on the ground, turning in a half circle. Gu Yun stopped, staring at the young man who appeared quite familiar, yet at the same time, he did not dare to call out to him.

"How could there be such a coincidence," Gu Yun thought with hesitation. *"Did I recognize the wrong person from missing him too much?"*

Shen Yi caught up to him: "How... oh!"

The Black Iron Camp's soldier following Chang Geng finally returned to reality, he quickly dismounted and said: "Marshal!"

Gu Yun's horse seemed to be startled, its front hoof was lifted up slightly, panting hard as its leg tapped the ground.

Chang Geng was afraid that at this moment, even if someone were to throw him into a mountain of tranquilizer, it would still not be able to stop his heart from trembling greatly inside his chest. He sat numbly on his horse for a moment, his mind blank, the sharp tongue which could make a lotus bloom now born a blossom of a tyrannical flower, blocking all his words inside.

He could only rely on instinct, revealing a stiff smile.

Gu Yun called in a low voice: "Chang Geng?"

呼——
这件事要是被了然知道大概能把他笑成个没板牙的高僧吧
我真是……
！

嗯?
呼——
这路边站着的人……

！
真是他.....！
长庚？

These two words exploded, blowing up and ringing in Chang Geng's ear. He rubbed his nose from the embarrassment of his inability to calm down: "I coincidentally traveled to Sichuan and happened to hear from Miss Chen that yifu will arrive in these two days, I had decided to rest here for a while. How timely, I was going for a stroll, I did not expect to be able to meet with you here."

The little soldier on the side thought in astonishment: *"Bathing and changing into new clothes, indicating the exact time and location every day...just for a stroll?"*

He looked intently at Chang Geng's unremarkable horse, suspecting that it was a godly steed hidden under its ordinary exterior.

At this moment, the door slammed open, Master Sun thoroughly ignored the moving scene of father and son reunion after many years of separation, hurriedly rushed out then vomited.

Chang Geng's suffocating breath finally returned to his chest again. He tilted his head and glanced at the Ministry of War's official who appeared like an ill chicken, asking in a gentle voice while pretending to sound surprised: "Why, did I say something disgusting?"

Gu Yun laughed.

In the past few years, although he was somewhat aware of Chang Geng's whereabouts, he did not expect for the other boy to turn out like this, it seemed as if he had been reborn anew.

Gu Yun momentarily forgot about their anger-filled separation from last time, about the lingering frustration, their cold war, and his perseverance to send people to keep an eye on Chang Geng's whereabouts.

He was astonished of being able to recognize Chang Geng and stopping in time, because the boy was truly different — each of his movements, to his behaviors, to the smile on his face, everything had changed.

Time has once again shrunk in front of his eyes, Gu Yun

calculated with his fingers — *how could he not change, it had been more than four years already.*

Shen Yi came over and smiled: "My gods, the little Prince is already... do you still remember me?"

Chang Geng: "Greetings, General Shen."

Shen Yi said: "If it were to be me, I won't be able to recognize you. Only your yifu, missing you so much every day, he would always take a longer look whenever he caught sight of someone slightly resembling you..."

Gu Yun could no longer bear it, he interrupted: "Where did you find so much nonsense?"

Shen Yi looked back and forth, laughing out loud then proceeded to usher his horse over to Master Sun, bent down to put him back on the carriage. He reached out and waved his hand in front of the man: "Master Sun, are you still alright? Hold on for a while longer, we will arrive at the inn soon."

Master Sun leaned on the cart, panting heavily, quickly tensing up again.

But Master Sun soon discovered that Chang Geng was his savior. Since the encounter with Chang Geng on the road, these animals of the Black Iron Camp have switched from rushing to walking, as casual as going for a leisure stroll, even the sound of the horse hoof had become more gentle.

Chang Geng led the group back to the inn. There were not many rooms, even after renting the entire establishment, at least two people must share a room. Gu Yun said: "I am going to my son's place, give my single room to officer Sun."

Sun Jiao instinctively said with reluctance: "No, no, how could I dare let Marshal lower himself..."

Shen Yi patted his shoulder from behind, lowered his voice and said to Sun Jiao: "Master, please just accept it, his mood had improved since meeting with His Highness, or would you prefer to

see his 'I'm about to take your puny life' expression more?"

Sun Jiao: "..."

The sweat in Chang Geng's palms had not disappeared. Several times on the way here, the horse's reins had almost slipped out of his hands. It was as if he was in a drunken state. He understood that he must stay sober, but he could not help but indulge in it.

Before seeing Gu Yun, he was hesitating between 'leaving' or 'staying' After seeing Gu Yun, his mind had become blank.

Gu Yun finally remembered the old debt, as soon as he entered the room and closed the door, his expression immediately darkened: "You have become more and more disrespectful, the old butler said you have not once returned to the manor in the past four years. Last time when I entered the palace to report, His Majesty even asked me about it directly, how was I supposed to explain?"

In the past, Chang Geng would feel nervous whenever Gu Yun's expression slightly become off. He would either instantly admit to his mistakes, or would want to talk back. After not seeing him for so many years, Chang Geng was surprised to find that all the restraint and panic in his heart had disappeared. All of Gu Yun's emotions, regardless of whether he was angry or happy, Chang Geng wished nothing more than to engrave them all into his eyes.

Four years ago, he had endured immense pain, forcing himself to stay composed and said to Gu Yun: "The manor cannot hold me back."

Four years later, he looked at Gu Yun, revealing just the right amount of affection: "With yifu gone, there is no meaning in my return."

Gu Yun: "..."

He was not able to stay angry for more than three sentences. After hearing these words from Chang Geng, he could no longer maintain his cold face, his stone heart was softened into a piece of cotton.

Gu Yun turned his attention to the small room, there were a few medical books on the table, he picked one up then casually flipped through it: "Why were you reading these?"

Chang Geng: "I followed Miss Chen to learn about medicine. "

Gu Yun was surprised, thinking to himself: "*Did the Lin Yuan Pavilion bunch say something to him?*"

Then he secretly smiled: first of all, feeling that this thought of his was more or less only him overestimating himself, and secondly, people of the Lin Yuan Pavilion were not at all the talkative type.

Chang Geng: "I had wanted to be well-educated in medicine, to be able to take good care of my yifu in the future. But unfortunately, my talent is limited, I only know the basics."

Gu Yun: "..."

"How sweet is this kid's mouth?" he thought helplessly. *"How deadly."*

After many years of guarding the Silk Road, Gu Yun's spirit of wanting to bare his talents for all to see had gradually disappeared, resembling a godly weapon that had been returned to its scabbard. The two men did not mention the frustrating argument from last time, instead, peacefully caught up and told each other about what they have seen during these past years.

While talking, Chang Geng suddenly found that his side had gone quiet, he gathered his courage and turned his head to take a look next to him - the bed of the inn was quite small, half of Gu Yun's body seemed to be hanging outside the bed, the blanket only covered a corner of him, his leg almost reached the end of the bed. He had one hand behind his head, lying in the posture of momentary rest, but had unknowingly fallen asleep.

Chang Geng instantly stopped talking, he stared intently at Gu Yun's profile for a long time in the darkness.

He raised his hand, then retracted it again, after repeating for several times, his fingers hesitantly stayed in the air. He did not know

how long it took for him to still his trembling breath, then gently hugged Gu Yun's waist, patting as lightly as sweeping off dust while whispering: "Yifu, move inside a little, you are about to fall off the bed."

Gu Yun was awakened by him, but had quickly recognized where he currently was. He made an 'Mm' sound in response, with his eyes remained closed, he followed Chang Geng's hand and moved inside, whispering in a low tone: "Falling asleep in the middle of talking... not old yet but the body had already grown senile."

Chang Geng helped pull the blanket up and undid the hair crown for him: "It was because I placed the tranquilizer next to the pillow, you have also travelled in a rush, sleep now."

This time there was no response, he truly did fall asleep.

The space of the bed was very narrow, when whispering in a low voice, it suddenly created the illusion of an intimate embrace, Chang Geng almost bowed his head and kissed Gu Yun's temple, as if this was naturally the right thing to do.

However, he immediately realized the insolence of his thought, he quickly laid back down properly.

The tranquilizer seemed to had taken effect, Gu Yun was sleeping soundly in a relaxed state, but it seemed to be picky when it comes to its effectiveness. For Chang Geng, it was utterly useless. With Gu Yun lying next to him, whenever he closed his eyes, he always felt that this was only a dream, he could not help himself from opening his eyes again to confirm it was indeed reality.

After repeating several times, the small bit of drowsiness had vanished in thin air, Chang Geng simply did not sleep and quietly looked at Gu Yun.

Looking at him throughout the night.

The next morning, Chen Qing Xu arrived, she first used the dying Master Sun as a teaching example, then tossed him over for Chang

Geng to play with... no, *to take care of* - then went to meet Gu Yun.

Chang Geng only glanced at her figure from behind as she moved upstairs. His behavior did not show the slightest hint of difference, as if he was not at all curious.

Shen Yi was looking at Chang Geng's medical books in Gu Yun's house. Miss Chen did not ask about the symptoms, she first gave him a check up, then said after a while: "Did the Marquis' vision weakened compared to before?"

Gu Yun: "I was supposed to take the medicine yesterday, but since I wanted Miss Chen to take a look, I did not drink any."

Chen Qing Xu was deep in thought for a moment: "That year when my grandfather prescribed this medicine for the Marquis, he must have advised you that this is not the antidote. I am afraid it would not be able to last long."

Gu Yun did not appear to be surprised either, he only asked, "How much time do I have left?"

Chen Qing Xu said earnestly: "If the Marquis could restrain from taking the medicine now on, it may be able to work for a few more years."

"I'm afraid that is not possible," Gu Yun said. "What about increasing the dosage or perhaps changing to a new prescription?"

Chen Qing Xu had not had time to answer, Shen Yi had solemnly said: "The medicine also carries poison, you have already taken them with diligence, changing to a new type of medicine would only mean changing to a new type of risk, it would not be much different than quenching thirst with poisonous water would it?"

"That is correct." Chen Qing Xu said, "Chen family called ourselves doctors, yet throughout all these years, we were unable to find a cure for Marshal's eyes and ears, how embarrassing."

Gu Yun smiled and said: "What is Miss Chen saying, it is I who have troubled you and your family."

Chen Qing Xu shook her head: "We have been trapped in the Central Plains for too long, always assuming that the Barbarians were ignorant. Marquis please give me a few more years, I intend to leave the country in these few days, perhaps by chance, I could figure out a solution."

Gu Yun was shocked as he heard this. He made an arrangement to meet with Miss Chen here in Sichuan, in addition to finding someone from the Chen family to confirm his situation, he mainly wanted to use this opportunity to stay for two days, letting *certain people* know that he was coming.

He did not require a young lady like Miss Chen to solve the problem which even her grandfather wasn't able to do anything about. He quickly said:

"Miss Chen you mustn't, I will be alright regardless if I can see and hear or not. The Northern Barbarian and our country have been enemies for generations. If you are risking your life for this trivial problem of mine, how could I explained to Chen family in the future?"

Chen Qing Xu did not answer, only took from her small bag a handwritten pamphlet: "This is a set of acupuncture procedure invented and refined by myself. It is useless, but it could alleviate the headache caused by the medicine. His Highness had followed me to study acupuncture for a while, he can understand them."

Seeing Gu Yun's frown, Chen Qing Xu added: "I did not tell him, he figured it out on his own."

Gu Yun's expression changed several times, then finally sighed, his head had already started aching.

Chen Qing Xu gave some advices in a few sentences, then found a pen and paper, writing down two prescriptions for nourishment: "Something is still better than nothing, I will be taking my leave now, the Marquis please take care."

"Wait," Gu Yun called out to her. "About leaving the country, Miss Chen please think it over carefully."

Chen Qing Xu looked back at him, her ice-cold face revealed a small rare smile.

"This is not entirely due to the Marquis's illness. It's just that in this world, there are certain things one must complete. Allow me to say a few boastful words, although we are numbered and our abilities are limited, our hearts share the same thoughts as the Marquis'.

"I was born in Chen's family, entered the way of Lin Yuan, how could I dare to hang on to the shadows of my ancestors and lag behind their backs for the future to come?," she said, "Marquis sir, we will meet again."

Afterwards, she did not wait for Gu Yun to talk any more and directly walked down the stairs.

Chang Geng had understood manners from his years traveling the pugilist world, he stepped over and said: "Miss Chen, let me see you off."

Chen Qing Xu waved her hands, then take a looked at his face. Even though he was young and strong, he would be alright even if he missed one night of sleep, but the traces could still be seen on his face.

Chen Qing Xu: "Why, was the tranquilizer not effective?"

Chang Geng smiled bitterly: "It is my own problem."

Chen Qing Xu pondered about it: "I always told you to stay calm, but the truth is, I don't know what is it in your heart that could not be calm, perhaps it is better said than done - People cannot avoid having emotions and desire. If you can't restrain yourself, it is better to let them go naturally with the flow."

Chang Geng was startled, involuntarily pouted, thinking to himself: *"How could this matter 'go with the flow'?"*

After leaving behind the sentence 'go with the flow of nature', she immediately went on her way, leaving Chang Geng to be in a state of perplexity for the entire day.

Gu Yun stayed in the small inn for two more days. Sun Jiao wanted to move quickly. But as he remembered the days of rocky roads and the speed as fast as flying causing one's every intestine to flipped upside down, he did not dare to open his mouth to urge them.

Unexpectedly, as they continued to be on the move again, Gu Yun had changed from the life-risking speed from before, with the Fourth Prince as a new addition to their group who glued himself to Marshal Gu all day - moving as relaxed as strolling in springtime scenery, occasionally, they would even join in with groups of merchants returning from the North.

In the Southern Frontier, the people were naturally born tough and strong, the bandits are rampaging. Officer Sun's mission to 'appease the subject' was in reality, simply an excuse. He intended to use the might of the Marquis of Order to grasp hold of evidence of Fu Zhi Cheng - although being an officer of the imperial court, yet colluded with the mountain bandits - to use the Southern Frontier as a breakthrough to call forth the very first Drumming Order.

But since their arrival in Sichuan, Gu Yun had made various delays to the journey. From Sichuan to the border are Fu Zhi Cheng's territories, the snakehead may have already aware of their whereabouts, how were they supposed to catch him off guard?

This time Master Sun no longer felt nauseous, but instead felt so anxious that his blood was bubbling inside.

Shen Yi quietly said to Gu Yun: "Offending the righteous but cannot offend the mischievous, you messed with him enough already. Be careful or else he will paint you in a bad light when returning to the imperial court."

Gu Yun smiled.

Seeing this indifferent smile, he could not help but want to break out in a long speech, but unexpectedly, Gu Yun whispered: "Neither the righteous nor the mischievous are the problem."

Shen Yi responded with frustration: "Causing disasters is the problem."

Gu Yun did not pay attention to him, suppressing his voice a little lower: "*That person* is the problem... It is the best for me to not play well with Ministry of War, do you not understand?"

Shen Yi was dumbfounded for a long time, then sighed and did not say anything any further.

When did the ever so prideful Marshal Gu begin to understand how to read between the lines?

Gu Yun: "Not listening to you the old maid anymore, I will go look for my son."

After saying this, he ushered his horse forward, thoroughly ignoring Shen Yi.

Shen Yi: "..."

He felt that the two were becoming more and more nauseating.

The southern areas had green hills on both sides, there was not much difference between autumn and winter. The scenery remained lush, with a small winding path in the middle, curling up with the shape of the mountain, one could not make out where it ended in the distance.

Gu Yun with a whip in hand, as if directing a country, casually explained to Chang Geng: "Those of us belonging to the military are always filled with anxiousness whenever we are in the face of locations such as this, if the other side had set up ambush, marching directly into it, we could only be beaten up - even in the territory of Great Liang, these places are generally very easy for bandits to take over..."

His last word was not even finished, but they could already hear the sharp noises of signaling whistle from afar.

Shen Yi said tiredly: "Marshal, are you a black crow in human form?"

T/N: the 2nd conflict is starting.

Chapter 40: Fighting Monkeys

T/N: I remembered during the first time I read this book, I really loved this conflict and had read this arc over several times to really take in all the schemes. translating this now really bring back good memories.

—

"Remember, on the battlefield, who does not want to die, will die first.....even if your enemy is a bunch of good-for-nothing."

—

On the top of the mountain, a large flag was raising up slowly. At first glance, it almost appeared to read '*Xinghua Village*'. But after taking a careful look as the winds blew past, written on it were the words '*Xing Zi Lin*'. Large and small mountain bandits hid themselves behind the grass, dressed in self-made armors, their longbows and daggers aimed at the people below.

A glint of silver flashed on top of the mountain, Chang Geng narrowed his eyes to look. There was a Heavy Armor which no one knew where they have stolen from standing on the hill, resembling a shooting target, the face of its wearer could not be seen from this distance.

Bandits robbing the Marquis of Order himself, Chang Geng momentarily did not know whether to laugh or cry.

But as he looked back, he found that Gu Yun wasn't smiling, in fact, it was the opposite. He appeared quite infuriated, squeezing out the word from his teeth: "Idiot."

Chang Geng quickly thought about it, lowering his voice: "Then the rumors about the Southern Frontier officials colluding with bandits were no rumor, but the truth?"

Gu Yun did not say anything, his expression darkened even further.

During the Great Liang dynasty, the native products of the

Eastern Sea were pearls, the native products of Loulan were fine wines, and the native products of the Southern Frontier were mountain bandits.

In the past two years, when the farming puppets were carried out, farmers weren't able to find jobs. Some had followed the traveling merchants to make a living in the north, some had decided to abandon the light to come to the dark and became mountain bandits. When goods and rations became cheaper, money became more valuable. Thus there were fewer and fewer people who would stock up on food, but instead, hoarded gold and silver: this has greatly contributed to and increased the rates of bandits looting.

The mountain bandits' culture was very wild spread here, there were more bandit nests than there were rabbits, this situation could be said to resemble the saying - '*wildfire could never cease, reborn again with the spring breeze*'.

The relationship between the Southern Frontier Army and the Ministry of War resembled that of a child and its stepmother: their funding was nowhere near efficient, they could not afford to fight back against the bandits.

And although the bandits won in numbers, their general combat power was limited. If facing against the imperial army, they could only end up having nest after nest be swept through, hence they would greatly fear the garrison troops as well.

When people have money, all they would want to pursue were peace and stability. No one would wish to live a life of being chased after — mountain bandits, in the end, were still human.

Thus, in the long run, the Southern Frontier Army and the local bandits have formed a mutual relationship.

The Southern Army commander Fu Zhi Cheng was originally a bandit. On one hand, he restrained them, tried to let them loot only the money without injuring the passerby, but on the other hand, he did not cover for them either. The funding for the Southern Frontier troops every year were incredibly limited, and for them to be able to sustain themselves to this day, the 'contribution' of these bandits

could not be ignored.

The collusion between officers and bandits was of course not something to be proud of, Gu Yun was fully aware of this. In the past two years, the Emperor had been promoting the farming puppets and opened the business road, these were clearly great policies for the country to make the nation rich and strong. But no one knew where the problem lay, not only did the national treasury become emptier, even the military funds had to be cut down again.

The South had just experienced flooding, the disaster has passed but the relieving process was still undergoing. If a battle were to break out, the bandits would start to scatter to villages and towns, the people would be even more devastated. But if the imperial court truly wanted to remove the commander of the Southern Frontier Army because of this incident, Gu Yun simply could not think of any other who could keep guard of this place.

With these two dilemmas, one could only pick the lesser one: Gu Yun had no choice but to temporarily think of a way to save Fu Zhi Cheng.

After a few years in the future, when the Silk Road was complete, the inland commercial road of Great Liang would be fully opened. Loads of silver from overseas would be able to flow into Great Liang, allowing the country a room to breathe. When that time came, not only would they send troops, but they would also adjust the passage to the Southern Frontier, tightening the control of this territory that was far away from the emperor, only with these two approaches being carried out at the same time could they completely clean up this problem.

Unfortunately, except for himself, other people did not seem to want to understand these problems.

In fact, it wasn't that they didn't understand it. It's just that in their eyes, the Drumming Order and flattering His Majesty to boost their wealth in the future was much more important.

On the road, Gu Yun had been thinking of various ways to protect Fu Zhi Cheng, he had quietly and deliberately sent a letter to

inform him. But unexpectedly, the man decided to do something like this.

Which kind of bandit would bring along their entire nest, raising the flag, and beating the drum, making it clear to the other party who exactly they are?

Attempting to rob from the envoy of the imperial court, this was no different than rebellion.

In these few years, Chang Geng had been mixing in with the common folks, traveling all four sides. He had long been knowledgeable about the people's livelihood in the current situation. After a little thought, the cause and effect had become clear to him. He looked at Gu Yun's expression and whispered: "Yifu, I think this might not be General Fu's doing."

Gu Yun coldly replied: "Nonsense, Fu Zhi Cheng isn't this foolish."

These bandits were an illiterate bunch, it would be quite a challenge to be able to find someone who could read and count, all these mountains might have to share one person to do accounting work. Perhaps they were able to catch a few vague rumors from somewhere, then decided to close in on them with the purpose of scouting while displaying their might at the same time, then, later on, they could show their merits to Fu Zhi Cheng.

Up high, a bandit was waving a simple *tong hou*, shouting towards the foot of the mountain to Gu Yun's group of people: "Who are you, state your name!"

Beside him, Shen Yi did not know whether to laugh or cry, pulling an arrow from behind him: "Grand Marshal?"

Gu Yun: "Shoot him down."

The arrow in Shen Yi's hand was released almost at the same time as Gu Yun's order. Like piercing through bamboo, he directly hit the bandit holding the *tong hou*. A bird cried out and flew up in the sky, its sharp voice echoing throughout the valley.

The whole mountain was fired up.

When Officer Sun saw this, he could no longer feel proud about being able to catch Fu Zhi Cheng's weakness, he immediately became frightened, climbing out of the carriage and constantly said: "We can not! Marshal, we can not, there are at least a hundred bandits in this mountain. We are just a group of few people, the generals are not donning their armors either, we are completely unarmed! There is also His Highness, His Highness is of prestigious royalty, we cannot be careless..."

Gu Yun did not look at him, and instead waved his hand at Chang Geng: "Your Highness, were you diligent in martial arts training?"

Chang Geng slightly bowed: "To be a small cavalry under the Marshal, I should still be qualified."

"Come, I will teach you how to fight mountain monkeys."

After Gu Yun finished, he ushered his horse and rushed forwards. Chang Geng did not hesitate, immediately following after him. All the Black Iron Camp soldiers were well-trained. As soon as Gu Yun moved, they immediately understood their commander's intention. They all began charging forwards, leaving behind only the scream of Officer Sun: "Marshal, we can not—"

The next moment, there was a force behind his neck, his entire body suddenly became lighter - Shen Yi had picked him up with the hilt of his sword, throwing him onto his horse.

Sun Jiao cried out, his eyes turned white from the impact of fall.

Shen Yi reluctantly said: "Master Sun, please do not scream anymore, this general will inevitably keep you from dying, rest assured."

As General Shen said this, he could not help but feel bad for himself - that Marshal Gu was a young master born from the Marquis' manor. Since his childhood, there had always been an old maid following him everywhere, ordering them around had become a

habit. After he grew up, he found that there was no old maid in the Black Iron Camp, thus had considered Shen Something to be his old maid, how absurd.

Having said that, Shen Yi looked at Master Sun, who had already fainted: "This was the first time I saw an officer that resembled a eunuch so much."

On the top of the hill, a bandit reported to their leader: "Big brother, I heard that eunuch called out 'Marshal'."

The leader's whole body was buried in the Heavy Armor, he pushed up the protective mask, angrily shouted: "Stop talking nonsense, hurry and shoot the arrows! Surround! Surround them!"

The sound of the horn blowing from inside the valley rang out once again, the bandits shouted as they rushed down from the top, aiming directly at Gu Yun's 'force' consisting of a handful of people.

There was no telling if the bandits intended to boost their courage or something else, encircling them as they continued to beat the drum and sound the gong, one charged forward from one direction, the other screamed and shouted, rushing from the opposite side of the mountain, surrounding them, dust and sand scattering in the air.

It was a pity that most of their horses were robbed from the hands of the merchants: how could they match against the one-in-a-million godlike steed of the Black Iron Camp? They immediately got left behind.

Gu Yun made a gesture, several soldiers behind him immediately understood and started to scatter into various direction, the target for the arrows shot from the mountain instantly became disarray.

A line of bandits was directly in front of them. Gu Yun drew his sword in indifference, its long blade shining bright like snow. He said to Chang Geng: "Remember, on the battlefield, who does not want to die, will die first..."

Chang Geng was almost blinded by the sword in his hand.

His sword resembled a flying dragon, one slash had sent blood splattered to four sides, two in and two out, the bandits' corpses piled up to a mountain.

Gu Yun casually finished the second half of the sentence: "...even if your enemy is a bunch of good-for-nothing."

The leader was holding a *Qian Li Yan* watching from above. As soon as the situation went wrong, he said in fury at once: "I told you to surround them, what is going on?"

Next to him, a small bandit said with a frown: "Big brother, I don't know!"

At this moment, another bandit ran over: "Big brother, things are not good!"

However, in just a flash, a cavalry had appeared at the mountain entrance. The bandit holding the tong hou did not have time to pull back his neck. A blade flashed, his head was instantly separated from his body.

Gu Yun's horsemanship was superb, riding across the rocky mountains as if he was on flat surface, crossing through an incredibly narrow path, he slashed down with his sword, a bloodcurdling-scream instantly sounded out from behind the large rock — as it turned out, there was someone in hiding, waiting to ambush — Gu Yun shook off the blood on his blade. He seemed to wait for Chang Geng for a moment, then said: "There are many places to use as cover in the mountains, and there will always be snakes lurking behind them. You are superb in martial arts, but you won't necessarily be able to avoid ambushes."

Chang Geng swept his eyes over and saw there was indeed a bow mechanism set up readily behind the large rock, waiting to shoot. His horse was not an exceptional war steed, following after Gu Yun with difficulty, but he only felt that the blood in his whole body had started to become hotter, he asked: "Yifu, how did you know?"

Gu Yun smirked: "Used to it."

As soon as he finished, a rock suddenly fell from above. Gu Yun seemed to have eyes on top of his head. He ushered his horse and it leaped forward, the rolling rock almost grazing the tip of the horse's tail. At the same time, Gu Yun's entire body left the saddle, grabbing a vine next to him and quickly hoisting himself up in the air. Chang Geng instinctively leaned back as he heard a slashing sound, either way, he still did not want the cruel yifu up high to splatter blood all over his face.

Gu Yun looked at him from above, raised his eyebrows and smiled. He whistled, the well-trained horse immediately followed.

Chang Geng's heart was beating like mad, Gu Yun's smile was about to steal his soul away.

Gu Yun shouted towards him: "When fighting monkeys in the mountains, remember to always take the advantage in elevation first."

At this time, the 'enveloping circle' of the bandits had been plunged into complete chaos. Several entrances of their dens up high had quickly become occupied, they began to scatter and flee to all direction like flies. One after another was killed off by arrows shooting down from above. Chang Geng hurriedly caught up to him, only to see Gu Yun had mounted his horse again, and at the same time, taking out a special arrow from behind.

The bow and the arrow were very heavy. The longbow appeared to be dozens of pounds in weight, equipped with a box as big as a thumb. Chang Geng narrowed his eyes, thinking: "*Is there a golden box on the bow?*"

In the next moment, the white steam spurting out on the longbow confirmed his speculation. The arrow shaft seemed to be made out of iron, creating a sharp echoing noise when released from the string, as if twenty fireworks had exploded as it rushed towards the sky - the iron arrow resembled a miniature version of *Baihong* arrow, piercing through the sun, hitting a large rock.

The rock shook for a moment, then fell down without warning.

The monkeys were scattered, their leader was hindered by the Heavy Armor. It took him a moment to look up, but before he could see anything, both the Armor and himself had been buried underneath the rock with a loud *bang!*

Chang Geng smiled and said: "Yifu, this I know, in a battle, one must first capture the king, am I right?"

He was guarded by Gu Yun the entire time, whizzing through hundreds of savage mountain bandits, not a single hair on his head was messed up, his clothes fluttering with the wind. At first glance, he resembled an alluring young master.

Gu Yun let out a 'tch', thinking to himself: "*This is it, next time when I return to the capital, I'm afraid the numbers of ladies who throw me their handkerchiefs will be cut by half*."

T/N: yifu is thinking his son is too handsome now hehe

After half an hour, Gu Yu took his few 'unarmed' Black Iron Camp soldiers and proudly marched into the bandit's den.

As most of the bandits saw their silver-hued boss die off, they immediately fled all at once. They were familiar with how the terrain was. Once they scattered into the mountains, they would disappear in a blink of an eye.

Gu Yun only had a handful of people, it was not convenient to chase after them. They were only able to capture a few of them that had not been able to run and strung them up like birds.

Gu Yun sat down on the tiger skin chair of the bandit leader, feeling that it was somewhat off. He stood up and uncovered the tiger skin on the chair: "The throne of the king of the mountain is truly unique."

The four legs of the magnificent tiger-skin chair had been sawn off, a stack of gold was piled up underneath it, then covered the top with a wooden board.

Gu Yun: "One could lay golden eggs while sitting on top of this?"

Shen Yi coughed, gesturing for the Marshal to speak some sense.

At this time, Master Sun, who wet himself from fear had changed his trousers. Seeing this situation, he immediately realized this opportunity could not be lost, it would never return again once gone. Changing his cowardly behavior from before, he daringly stepped forward and shouted: "Whoever gave you the courage to rob the imperial court envoy in the middle of the road? Who came up with this? Speak!"

Chang Geng was originally holding and admiring Gu Yun's special bow, upon hearing these words, he looked up and said: "Robbing the envoy is treated the same as rebellion, but as long as one is not the leader, ordinary bandits may only be banished. But for especially courageous men like you all here..."

He stopped here, revealing a smile containing a deeper meaning. He ignored the few shivering bandits, appearing as if he had just only unintentionally say one sentence. He quickly turned his attention to the other man, smiling while asking: "Yifu, your bow and arrow are very nice, may I have it?"

Gu Yun waved his hand: "Take it."

Sun Jiao was startled, not understanding the Fourth Prince whom he had just met. At first, he only felt that the man was not at all arrogant, he was gentle, very good at talking, and was not the calculating type either. But he now realized that he might have been blind.

Chang Geng said this one sentence, the bandits were not so stupid either, they immediately cried out.

"We peasants did not know that you are the imperial envoys, the Masters please forgive us!"

"It's not easy to make a living on this road. In this tiny region, we don't get to see a single person for numerous days, who would have thought that the moment we started, we would instantly run into the imperial envoys. Us peasants are innocent... No, we are not quite innocent, but we still have young ones and elders, it's not at all not

easy!"

Sun Jiao: "..."

At this moment, a Black Iron Camp soldier suddenly walked in quickly and whispered in Gu Yun's ear: "Marshal, Southern Central Inspector Master Kuai sent a messenger, saying that he had heard the news of the Marquis being harassed by the local gangsters, he will be arriving soon with two hundred personal guards."

Gu Yun raised his expressionless face, just in time to meet the eyes of Sun Jiao, the blood on Marshal Gu's body still haven't dried, scaring away any triumphant glint in Sun Jiao's eyes.

Fu Zhi Cheng was originally a bandit. Even if he had later on surrendered and was recruited in the army, and even with his awe-inspiring merits, it was still very unreasonable for him to become a high ranking officer at the frontier.

But unfortunately, with the Western Regions' rebellion that year, the thefts from the Southern areas also took this opportunity to invade the territory of Great Liang. Gu Yun had already gone to the west, there was no available personnel in the imperial court, they had no other choice but to resurrect a dead horse and ordered Fu Zhi Cheng to lead the troops in the Southern Frontiers.

However, Emperor Yuan He still did not trust him. The Southern Central Inspector Kuai Lan Tu was designed especially to restrain Fu Zhi Cheng, holding in his hands two hundred personal guards, as skilled as elite troops, allowing him to act at will in any critical moment. Even if a real incident was to happen, these two hundred soldiers would still be unable to fight against the garrison troops stationed in the South Frontier, but it will not be difficult for them to break out of the siege and send a message back.

Both Kuai Lan Tu and Fu Zhi Cheng can be described as enemies clashing in the narrow roads, both sides had long wanted to plunge the other party to their death, the one who would soon arrive definitely won't harbor good intentions.

Gu Yun: "My foot has just entered the bandit's den but inspector

Kuai had already 'heard' the news, his news system is even better than the God of the Soil* himself."

**Tu Di Gong(土地公), a popular local deity, believed to be in charge of administering the affairs of a particular village.*

Sun Jiao also knew that Kuai Lan Tu had not paid attention to grasping a good timing, setting off too fast. He quickly tried to cover: "To tell Marshal the truth, this trip of ours is a secret. We did not expect to encounter His Highness while on the way, how could I dare let the Prince be at risk? I had no choice but to request the Inspector for some reinforcements..."

"Master Sun had good intention," Chang Geng said with a smile. "But how do you know that this trip to the South will be risky?"

Sun Jiao probably knew that his supporter was about to arrive, his back also became straighter. He said: "This time, as your subject was ordered to travel to the South to appease the troops, I have long been aware of the rampaging bandits situation in this region, hence for the sake of preventing any unforeseen incident, I had deliberately requested His Majesty for a Drumming Order before leaving - as it turned out, something did went wrong, but fortunately, the Marquis was greatly experienced and did not faze in the face of danger."

Gu Yun let out an unamused smile, not paying his flattery any mind.

Sun Jiao: "These bandits are rampaging without fear, becoming more and more courageous. If they dare to rob even the court officials, then what would happen to the common people? If we don't get rid of this problem, the southwest will remain unstable. It seemed that I was correct in bringing along the Drumming Order. The very first Drumming Order of Great Liang is about to fall directly on General Fu."

Chapter 41: Beginning

T/N: delicious plots

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Gu Yun: "Please bring General Fu up. Let me see how he intends to rebel."

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In addition to two hundred soldiers, the Southern Frontier inspector also possessed ten sets of Heavy Armor and fifteen sets of Light Armors — adding a Giant Kite into the mix, then judging from firepower alone, they would be no different than the defensive force of Yanhui Town of the Northern Frontier.

The moment he received a letter from Sun Jiao, he knew that the day he had been waiting for was arriving.

Fu Zhi Cheng had been the mountain king for a long time: he was crude and arrogant, and had caused Kuai Lan Tu — who was sent by the imperial court to keep an eye on him — to lose face in more than one occasion. The hatred between the two had a long history.

The Emperor had determined to gather the military powers throughout the country, and the implementation of the Drumming Order would inevitably require someone as a sacrifice. The northwest was the territory of Gu Yun, they temporarily could not touch him. Jiangnan was made up mainly of naval forces, they bear the most important task of keeping surveillance on the Western ships. Combined with the recent incident, it would be greatly inconvenient to touch them now. The Central Plains army was for defending the center of the country, even if they wanted to do something, it must be left for last. Only the desolated southern areas of the country could be used as a breakthrough.

If Fu Zhi Cheng was smart, during this period, he should have stayed quietly in the Southern Frontier, pretending that he did not exist, yet he had to jump out and threaten the court using the name

of a family ‘funeral’.

A soldier came forward, whispering: "Master, the fire oil is ready."

Kuai Lan Tu took over the *Qian Li Yan* and observed the charming green hills in front of him. The owner of this hill was originally a Taoist priest named Jing Xu. Due to the Emperor’s belief in Buddhism, the common folks also followed suit. His Taoist temple grew more difficult to sustain by the days, not only so, seeing that he could easily be picked on, many outlaws had even come at his doors to rob him. In a fit of rage, Jing Xu had accidentally killed a thief. From that point on, there was nowhere left for him to be. Having no choice, he had gone to the mountain and became a bandit.

This person knew how to read and write, his methods were ruthless, he could be categorized as an exceptional individual, and later became the leader of all the bandits within the three hundred miles of mountains in the Southern Frontier.

Kuai Lan Tu knows that Jing Xu and Fu Zhi Cheng had a close relationship. To kill Fu Zhi Cheng, he would have to first start from this priest.

Ever since the Emperor sent a golden medal order to Gu Yun, Kuai Lan Tu and Sun Jiao had already come up with a plan. He first spread the news in the Southern Frontier, saying that the imperial court envoys were coming, with the purpose of investigating the case of Fu Zhi Cheng’s collusion with the bandits.

In order to ensure that the imperial envoy would not get harmed, Fu Zhi Cheng must have informed the major bandits’ leaders in advance, saying that ‘the envoy appeasing the troops’ will arrive soon, telling them to restrain their underlings — if so, then would these bandits listen to General Fu, or listen to the rumors? If their hearts already harbored doubt, then when Fu Zhi Cheng understated the situation and described it simply as ‘the envoy appeasing the troops’, what would these leaders think?

Nearing the time of the envoy’s arrival at the frontier, Kuai Lan Tu received an informing letter from Sun Jiao. He then proceeded to

send someone to pretend to be a soldier of the Southern Frontier army to go find Jing Xu, to inform him that the Marquis of Order's carriage had been robbed in the middle of the road. General Fu wished to avoid the eyes of those with the intention of uncovering his connection with the bandits, and had no choice but to ask the priest for help.

Jing Xu and Fu Zhi Cheng have the best friendship. At this moment, regardless of any suspicion he might have, in this critical situation, he would still support Fu Zhi Cheng until the end. As he heard this news, his loyalty arose, he immediately rushed over.

The second after they left, Kuai Lan Tu who was waiting for ambush instantly used Heavy Armors to block the entrance of the mountain pass, thousands of oiled up arrows preparing to burn Jing Xu's hideout down to ash.

At the same time, he sent out Heavy Armors to circle the mountain, anyone who escaped would be shot with explosive: from the gangsters guarding the mountain to the elderly and the weak women and children living in the mountains, all would be treated equally. They only deliberately allowed a few witnesses to live, letting them run off to inform Jing Xu.

Seeing the mountain had been burnt down to rubbles, Kuai Lan Tu stroked his beard, laughing with satisfaction.

"This is enough, let's move. Let us go meet Marshal Gu." Kuai Lan Tu waved his hand, Heavy Armors and two hundred well-trained soldiers gathered, preparing to march out. Kuai Lan Tu mounted his horse, looked back at the mountain being ravished by fire becoming a mess of flesh and blood, speaking with indifference: "Let's go listen to Fu Zhi Cheng's reasonings, what are wicked mountain bandits, what is 'wildfires can never cease, reborn again with the spring breeze'. This officer lit the wildfire, let me see how they will be reborn again — move out!"

This time, the whole mountain knew that Fu Zhi Cheng had made a plan to slow down the soldiers. In order to save himself in the face of imperial envoys, he had turned against his 'brothers' of the past.

Kuai Lan Tu intended for the bandits and Fu Zhi Cheng to fight within themselves, Fu Zhi Cheng had always been conceited and confident. Did he think that no one could grasp his weak point?

Of course, in order to prevent Fu from committing treason when being forced into a corner, Sun Jiao had specially invited the Marquis of Order here to keep guard.

Marquis Gu had not yet reached the age of thirty, dealing with the rebels might be very efficient, but it might not be possible to restrain the high ranking official who climbed out of a heap of corpses like Fu Zhi Cheng — but that did not matter, in the end, he still owed the Old Marquis for his support.

Kuai Lan Tu was absolutely certain that Fu Zhi Cheng would not dare to harm Gu Yun. Although most of those belonging to the previous Marquis' faction had already withdrawn from the army due to old age, but the relationships were complicated, their might still remained. If he dared to be ungrateful and harmed the Old Marquis' only son, the chaos arising from inside his Southern Frontier Army would be his downfall.

In addition, even if that Fu was arrogant, would he dare think that the measly Southern Frontier garrison had the ability to rise up and shake the foundations of Great Liang?

Just as they left, a wooden bird as large as a palm turned its eyes, fluttering its wings and flew into the sky engulfed in blood and smoke, quickly turning into a little black dot and disappearing.

At the same time, Fu Zhi Cheng in the Southern Frontier Garrison received the news that the carriage of the Marquis of Order was robbed. He was utterly shocked, instantly jumping up and grabbed the collar of the scout: "Where is the Marquis now?"

The scout said: "The Marquis shot and killed Xing Zi Lin, but somehow afterwards, he continued to stay in his den and did not leave, even replaced the original flags of the bandits with the battle flags of the Black Iron Camp."

After Fu Zhi Cheng heard this, his face twitched for a moment, then he raised his hand and swiped all the cups on the table to the ground, his voice filled with hatred: "Little of success but plenty of failures!"

The scout did not dare to breathe out, quietly kneeling on one side, watching the commander of the Southern army walking back and forth in his room resembling a caged beast. Fu Zhi Cheng was not at all surprised to hear Gu Yun had cleaned through Xing Zi Lin's den, Gu Yun getting robbed for real would be a shocking, never-before-seen story.

The question was... what was the meaning behind the Marquis's action?

Why didn't he continue on his way, but stayed in the den?

If it was only for the purpose of interrogating the bandits, why should he change the flag?

Who was he waiting for? What was he waiting for?

Gu Yun came in the name of giving condolences. Why did he bring along the flags of the Black Iron Camp?

Since the battle flags were here, was the Black Tiger Emblem also here?

Was there truly only a few guards and a coward next to him?

There was also the Southern Central inspector about a hundred miles away who must have already prepared a large barrel of black mud ready to pour on Fu Zhi Cheng. Had Gu Yun already come in contact with him?

Which side was Gu Yun standing on?

Fu Zhi Cheng's eyelids suddenly twitched. He used to belong to the Old Marquis' faction, but he had never had any association with Gu Yun. Even so, he knew that Gu Yun had always despised his criminal ways.

With this visit of Gu Yun, Fu Zhi Cheng felt immensely uncertain.

"Prepare the horse," Fu Zhi Cheng said abruptly. "Three factions Shan Hu, Bai Lang, and Ling Hu come with me to meet the Marquis of Order and the envoy. Lin Bao stay on standby, using smoke as signal and prepare to act at any moment."

The scouts looked at Fu Zhi Cheng with trepidation. General Fu mobilized nearly half of the troops stationed in the Southern Army. Was he going to 'meet with the Marquis' or going to 'annihilate the Marquis'?

Fu Zhi Cheng took his long spear off the wall and angrily shouted: "What are you still standing there for!"

Following right after the forces of the Inspector, the Southern Frontier garrison also moved nearly half of its troops on the path of no return to Xing Zi Lin.

Deep into the night, on the official road of Southern Frontier, various groups of large and small caravans began to set up their temporary camps on the roadside. The merchants who wandered through the south and the north of the country were used to sleeping under the sky, they left only the night watchmen and a few torches, then gradually falling asleep.

Late at night, there were cries of cuckoos in the forest.

The watchman and a group of 'merchants' who just now pretended to fall asleep all stood up. They did not say a word, even when passing by each other, they only used eye contact to communicate, silently walking behind the accompanying van.

In the cart, there was a mezzanine, after clearing out all the goods on top, cold armors below were revealed, not the slightest glint of reflection.

The groups of nightwalkers equipped the steel armor with lightning speed: there were Eagles, Armors, and some light cavalry

suits.

They turned around and blended into the night from all directions, the mountains were disturbed for a moment, the sleeping birds were scared awake, but in an instant, everything was once again quiet as if nothing had happened.

Only the shining torches of the merchants were scattered in the mountains, twisting and turning with the land, resembling scattered gold.

This night, different complex forces of all walks of life, all harboring their own personal motives were heading in the direction of Xing Zi Lin.

The Xing Zi Lin bandit leader who was crushed under the rock probably could not imagine this even in his dream. That he was like a vital string, his momentary stupid decision had exploded the easily flammable situation of the Southern Frontier.

In the old nest of Xing Zi Lin, the group of bandits insisted they did not know about the arrival of the imperial envoys. Sun Jiao tried to interrogate them for a while, but it proved to be fruitless, he had no other choice but to give up, his eyes continuously glancing at the doors.

Gu Yun only ate a few bites then wiped his mouth and put down the chopsticks. When he saw the appearance of Sun Jiao who appeared as if he had grown an ulcer on his behind, he smiled and asked: “Officer Sun, the meal is not finished yet you have glanced at the door for about seven or eight times already. Looking forward to Inspector Kuai's arrival?”

Sun Jiao's face changed several times, he could barely smile: "Marshal you jest — how come Marshal is not eating more, is the food not up to your taste?"

"No," Gu Yun conveyed his meaning with a look. "It would be difficult to act if I ate too much, this is enough. That's right, Ji Ping,

if there is nothing else of importance, go check how much gold and silver there is in this den. Let's pack them up to bring along later."

Sun Jiao: "..."

Gu Yun: "Master Sun will not report me after we return right? Hey, to tell you the truth, the Ministry of War is tight with their budget, us Black Iron Camp doesn't have it easy either."

The bandits that were tied up in a group still had their wits with them, they quickly said: "We have records! We do! They are up there!"

Shen Yi looked back and saw that there was actually a 'hidden room' - a large ladder was set in the corner, leading up to the roof, a pile of thatched grass covering a small attic built on the beam.

"*Great*," Shen Yi thought. "*I have become an accountant in this chicken nest*."

At this time, Kuai Lan Tu was the first to arrive in Xing Zi Lin.

Kuai Lan Tu marched in with his personal guards. The blood and fire lingering on his body still haven't dissipated, he appeared to carry with him a strong murderous intent. He stepped forward and spoke up proudly: "Southern Central Inspector Kuai Lan Tu, greetings to the Marquis of Order, master Sun, the generals, and this..."

Chang Geng smiled: "Li Min."

Kuai Lan Tu: "..."

Sun Jiao hurriedly lowered his voice to remind him: "Don't be disrespectful, that is Yan Bei Wang, His Highness the Fourth Prince!"

Kuai Lan Tu was taken aback.

The youngest brother of the emperor, Li Min, had never appeared in front of people. Most only knew that he used to live within the common folks. After being brought back, he had stayed still in the Marquis manor and did not have any achievements. He was still so young... while he knew that although this young man was

of royalty, there was nothing to worry about, but he remained an unexpected variable, after all, this would always cause one to feel uneasy.

As if to foreshadow, Kuai Lan Tu's eyelids suddenly twitched.

But before he could say any more, a personal guard walked in and whispered in Kuai Lan Tu's ear.

Gu Yun: "Why, the spit of Master Kuai's family is so precious, not allowing us to hear either?"

Kuai Lan Tu kicked the guard away: "How disrespectful, whispering right in front of the Marquis and His Highness, where is your manner!"

The guard did not appear to be angry either, he immediately knelt on the ground and reported: "Reporting to all the Masters, there are tens of thousands of troops coming towards the direction of Xing Zi Lin, they seem to belong to the Southern Frontier Army!"

He had not yet finished his sentence when a strange officer walked up the mountainside. All the guards of the inspector picked up their swords and spears, like cold light in the dark night.

The leading officer did not appear to be frightened in the slightest, he raised his voice: "Southwest Governor Fu Zhi Cheng, bringing along personal soldiers to greet the Marshal!"

Gu Yun remained indifferent, thinking: "*That Fu truly is good at finding death.*"

Kuai Lan Tu subconsciously glanced at Chang Geng. Chang Geng smiled at him then turned to the ladder in the corner without hesitation and climbed up to the attic.

Kuai Lan Tu realized that this opportunity could not be lost, he immediately stepped forward and said: "Marshal, this officer had something to report!"

Gu Yun lifted his eyes.

Kuai Lan Tu: "That Fu Zhi Cheng, although being a defender of the region, yet he had neglected his duties, colluding with the bandits, tyrannizing the people, in communicating with the Southeast Sea, his intention to rebel is as bright as day, Marshal please be fully prepared..

"Oh, is that so?" Gu Yun was not at all surprised as he heard this. He only turned the old beads in his hand a few times at the fingertips, as if contemplating about something.

After a moment, he said: "Then bring him up."

Both Kuai Lan Tu and Sun Jiao looked at each other, they both thought they have heard it wrong.

Gu Yun: "Please bring General Fu up. Let me see how he intends to rebel."

Chang Geng climbed up to the small attic, finding that it was quite special. There was a window and a skylight with an excellent view. Moving up from the window was where the bandits had set up their flag. Shen Yi set a torch next to him, there was no telling what type of fuel was used, it created white smoke that was not scattered in the blowing wind, flying straight into the sky.

Chang Geng smiled and said: "I thought General Shen was doing accounting work, I thought about coming to helping out. It turned out you were sending a smoke signal."

Shen Yi leaped down from the window and curiously asked: "Your Highness even knows how to do accounting work? What have you been doing in the past few years?"

Chang Geng: "Nothing much, there was a period when I followed Miss Chen to learn medicine, occasionally helping a few friends in the pugilist world, traveling with the merchants, I knew a little bit of everything."

Shen Yi saw that he only responded for the sake of it, he did not ask any further. The knowledge and experience of a person wasn't something that one could forge, even if a young person pretended to

be unwavering, their act would be see through if someone were to pay enough attention.

Chang Geng's travel in the pugilist world these years was certainly not simple, otherwise he would not bear with him the unpredictable aura of unfathomable depth.

Chang Geng pushed open the small window in the attic and looked out.

Only to see the mighty troops moving up with the twist and turn of the land, their battle flags blowing in the wind.

In the light of the torches, the cold armors let out steam for miles, resembling a dragon panting heavily.

Fu Zhi Cheng had been in charge of the Southern Frontier garrison for a decade, he had soon become the king of this territory. At this moment, if he brought about one or two hundred people to 'eliminate the bandits plus greeting the imperial envoy', there was still room for maneuver, but he had actually mobilized half the troops in the garrison.

Chang Geng: "Yifu might have some intentions to protect General Fu at first, but as of right now, it seemed that he could not be saved anymore."

"Perhaps not only did he not appreciate it, he had also intended to make a scene." Shen Yi looked at Chang Geng's calm and undisturbed side profile, "Your Royal Highness bear the quality of a general who does not faze in the face of danger, it truly is rare."

"Growing accustomed to it with time," Chang Geng said quietly. "Last time when I went to the Eastern Sea rebel army nest with yifu, that was truly a frightening situation. At that time, there were only a few of us being a burden around him, no one knew when the navy will arrive, and there was no telling whether they could receive the news we sent out along the way. But even so, yifu was still talking and laughing like normally, then retreated safely in the end. At that time I had understood one thing ."

Shen Yi: "What?"

Chang Geng: "Fear is unreasonable."

Shen Yi thought for a moment then shook his head and smiled: "Of course, everyone knows that fear is unreasonable, but it is like being hungry at a certain time, and being cold when not wearing enough clothes. It is the natural reaction of the body. How can one restrain the natural reactions of their body?"

Chang Geng's face showed a not so obvious smile: "It is possible."

Shen Yi was startled, he suddenly had some kind inexplicable intuition, feeling that Chang Geng's words of '*it is possible*' seemed to hide a much deeper meaning.

Chang Geng: "I believe that as long as you are willing, there is nothing in the world that can defeat you, including this mortal flesh."

This sentence although sounding quite unremarkable, however, with Chang Geng's attitude and firm tone, his determination had created a strange enchantment, making people involuntarily become convinced.

Shen Yi: "Your Royal Highness, last time you and Marshal were trapped in the Eastern Sea, there were dozens of Lin Yuan Pavilion masters around you. It can be said that both sides had assisted one another. But it is different this time. We only have one Officer Sun who only insists on implementing the Drumming Order, inspector Kuai who doesn't harbor any good intentions, and that Fu Zhi Cheng will soon march up the mountain - he has thousands of troops in his hand. Isn't it much more dangerous than the last situation? Your Highness is not worried?"

Chang Geng calmly smiled and said: "I'm not worried. When I saw the battle flag of the Black Iron Camp in the attic, I instantly felt that there were three thousand Black Cavalries hidden in the southwestern mountain forest. I couldn't help but feel steady."

Shen Yi was taken aback, then let out a bitter smile. He was breaking a sweat in Gu Yun's stead, their family's little prince was not at all simple, he truly was descendant of the dragon.

Chang Geng: "Didn't you know, General Shen? My yifu may not want to protect Fu Zhi Cheng wholeheartedly."

Shen Yi：“……”

This he did not know!

Chapter 42: Chaos

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He wanted to be strong as soon as possible, to quickly arrive at the day where he could have a casual conversation with the Bone of Impurity… to be strong enough to protect one person.

—

Although Kuai Lan Tu's guards were ordered to make way, they did not withdraw their weapons either, leaving Fu Zhi Cheng only a narrow path packed with swords and blades. Bandit Fu did not give in either, leading two hundred elite soldiers up the mountain, all were fully armed, lining up in two rows, each one bearing their weapon.

Each side pointed their swords at the other. With the sound of metal, Fu Zhi Cheng led his men, biting his teeth and charging forwards.

He didn't appear to have come to apologize but to interrogate Gu Yun instead.

The Southern garrison had surrounded Xing Zi Lin, resembling a tiger stalking its prey, their forces pressed on to the mountain.

Kuai Lan Tu didn't expect him to be this courageous, he did not even bother to pretend, nor did he put the Marquis of Order in his eyes. His jaw couldn't help but tighten.

Fu Zhi Cheng rushed up the mountain like a stormy wind, and as he emerged, a strong murderous aura instantly hit one's face.

The dog blocking the way, Sun Jiao, was the first to catch the heat. When he hurriedly drew back, he had accidentally stepped on a bandit currently being tied up on the ground. The bandit let out a loud cry, causing Officer Sun's legs to go soft.

Fu Zhi Cheng had not yet opened his mouth, yet one man on this side had already been defeated.

Chang Geng looked down from the attic with great interest, saying to Shen Yi currently stunned at his side: "I just remembered something."

Shen Yi carefully listened.

Chang Geng: "Master Sun's younger sister was married to Imperial Uncle Wang as a concubine... His Majesty is truly... why did he let a brother-in-law of a brother-in-law enter the Ministry of War? Dealing with a group of dissatisfied generals all day, does he not feel exhausted?"

"...", Shen Yi carefully asked: "Your Royal Highness, just now you have said Marshal does not wish to protect Fu Zhi Cheng wholeheartedly, please elaborate on this."

Chang Geng: "Otherwise, why would we still stay at this den? If he truly wanted to protect Fu Zhi Cheng, he must have already rushed to the Southern Frontier garrison for questioning."

Shen Yi could not rebuke, he had indeed wondered about this as well. It was only due to his unconditional trust in Gu Yun over the years that led him to assume that Gu Yun had other plans.

"I had guessed when these lawless bandits closed in on us on the road, yifu had already begun to think about it. If Fu Zhi Cheng came to plead guilty, perhaps yifu would have considered his hard work over the years and leave him a way out. But now. .." Chang Geng smiled, "Greed is not wrong, being sly is not wrong, even stupidity is not wrong, but Fu Zhi Cheng shouldn't have openly challenged the Black Iron Camp."

Three generations had worked hard to build up the Black Iron Camp. Whether this military power was in the hands of the emperor or in the hands of Gu Yun, as long as the Black Iron Camp still stood, the peace and stability of Great Liang would be preserved. Directly challenging the Black Iron Camp was something that could shake the foundation of the nation, just for this reason alone, Gu Yun could not forgive him.

Fu Zhi Cheng stared intently at Gu Yun for a moment, then, in

the end, he still managed to remain somewhat rational. He returned his sword to its sheath then bowed down to pay respect: "Long time no see, Marshal Gu is doing well.”

As soon as Fu Zhi Cheng bowed his head, the soldiers behind him instantly withdrew their weapons at once, standing as still as a wall. The atmosphere immediately eased up.

Both Kuai Lan Tu and Sun Jiao secretly felt relieved, it seemed that asking for Gu Yun to come here was the right move.

"Not doing so well," Gu Yun looked at Fu Zhi Cheng for a while, then suddenly opening his mouth. "General Fu, just now Inspector Kuai had told me, although you are the Southwest Commander, yet you had colluded with the bandits, communicating with the Southern sea, your intention to rebel is as clear as day — what do you think about all this?"

Fu Zhi Cheng: "..."

No one expected that Gu Yun was even more straightforward than Fu Zhi Cheng. Even with the major Southern army currently surrounding mountains, he did not even bother to beat around the bush but had directly questioned him.

The situation below reverted back to its tense atmosphere, but Chang Geng in the attic remained at ease. He seemed to be very fond of the bow that Gu Yun gave him, always carrying the large and heavy object weighing a few pounds with him, not willing to let go for even a moment. This time, he had taken it down and held it in his hand, with a handkerchief no one knew where he has gotten from, carefully wiping the bow repeatedly.

Shen Yi said after a moment: "But if he has to give up Fu Zhi Cheng, wouldn't it mean sitting still and watch as His Highness forcefully implemented the Drumming Order?"

Chang Geng said without hesitation: "Did General Shen ever thought that as the Drumming Order appeared, even the old farmer in the village knows that this order divided the military power in yifu’s hands, the commanders from all side have objected to it, why is

it that he refused to speak up?"

Shen Yi blurted out his question: "Why?"

Chang Geng: "Because he had grown up together with the Emperor, he understands the stubbornness of that person more than anyone else in the world. As long as the Drumming Order has yet to be carried out, and the Emperor has yet to control the military power in his hands, he will not be able to eat well and sleep well. Opposing to it would only increase internal friction, causing conflict between the ruler and the subjects, and the villain would then gain the upper hand. This compromise will have to be done sooner or later, the only question is how."

His last words were almost covered up by a roar.

Kuai Lan Tu was not the timid type like Sun Jiao. As he heard Gu Yun's question, he immediately knew that this matter would not be settled smoothly, today in Xing Zi Lin, either he or Fu Zhi Cheng would perish here. There was also the large Southern Frontier garrison army under the mountain, The more nonsense, the faster it was to find death. Wasn't it better to capture that Fu in one fell swoop while he was still not alert? At that moment, regardless of how large the Southern army was, they would become nothing more than a headless snake under the mercy of others.

Inspector Kuai came to this decision in a flash, moving past Gu Yun, pointing at Fu Zhi Cheng and shouted: “Capture that lawless convict!”

Chang Geng in the attic took a heavy iron arrow from its carrier and slowly pulled the bowstring. The tail of the bow created little white mist, spraying on his face. The face was covered with water vapor revealing even more of its gentle handsomeness.

Shen Yi secretly felt startled as he watched. This bow was made especially for Gu Yun, although with the addition of a golden box, ordinary people still would not be able to achieve the effect of a *Bai Hong* arrow. Chang Geng pulled the string to its limit while aiming, both his arms were incredibly steady, not trembling in the slightest bit — these skills of the little Prince is probably more than just being

'diligent'.

Shen Yi: "Even if Marshal truly wished to compromise, who can replace General Fu to clean up this messy situation of the Southern Frontier?"

Chang Geng: "I want to hear the details."

Shen Yi quickly counted all large and small military generals in the imperial court: "In addition to the new Jiangnan naval commander Zhao You Fang who possessed a certain amount of skills, the other could not be put to use. Maybe there is no shortage of fierce officers, but being a commander of a territory, just knowing how to fight won't be enough, qualifications and experience cannot lack neither. One had to be able to argue with the local forces and even the Ministry of War. The Emperor would not pull the navy commander to the southern mountains would he?"

Fu Zhi Cheng under the attic certainly refused to let himself be captured without a fight. The Southern Frontier general did not take the name of fierce and unparalleled for granted: one sword slash cut off a head, then turned to greet the Heavy Armor that came over behind him, he did not shy away or hide, swinging his sword and stepping on the shoulder of the Heavy Armor, using it as leverage. His whole body flipped in the air, and the three accompanying Southern Army soldiers reacted at once, the whips in their hands flying forward, entangling the Heavy Armor.

The machine and Fu Zhi Cheng simultaneously roared. Fu Zhi Cheng held the iron sword with both hands, cruelly struck down, accurately stabbing into the gap behind the Heavy Armor, directly piercing the neck of the person inside. The Heavy Armor stiffly moved a step forward then stood still in its place —

Then, blood poured out like stream.

Fu Zhi Cheng rode on the shoulder of the Heavy Armor, reaching out to wipe the blood on his face, eagle-like gaze striking directly at Kuai Lan Tu.

Kuai Lan Tu finally took a step back subconsciously.

At this moment, an arrow-like rainbow piercing through the sun, dived down from above, its screech echoing in the entire den. Fu Zhi Cheng's pupils shrunk, but it was already too late to dodge, the arrow accurately grazed past Kuai Lan Tu’s hair crown, cutting it into two halves. Inspector Kuai's hair scattered, appearing like a demon. Immediately, it passed straight through the Heavy Armor’s chest and broke through the double-layered steel plate. Fu Zhi Cheng was struck by the unrelenting force of the arrow, swaying then fell down. The trajectory of the arrow did not stop, piercing onto the ground.

The ground exploded into a small pit, the three Southern army soldiers retreated at the same time. The arrow tip directly nailed to the intersection of their three whips.

The tail of the arrow trembled non-stop, like the buzzing of the wind.

"Too arrogant," Chang Geng muttered to himself. Then, under the frightened look of everyone, pulled another iron arrow on the string and continued his sentence: “General Shen, don't forget, there is another person."

Shen Yi was still immersed in the shot just now, only managing to find his voice after a long time: "... Pardon me, I cannot think of any.”

Chang Geng: "Far out in the distance, but close at hand."

Shen Yi was shocked: "What?"

Chang Geng: "That's right, it is you."

Under the attic, Gu Yun’s expression was void of his regular carefree aura, he appeared extremely cold from tension: "Hey, I have always wanted to ask, who gave you the courage to raise so many private soldiers?"

Kuai Lan Tu’s expression turned dark, his ears were still filled with the buzzing sound of the iron arrow, he could not figure out which side Gu Yun was standing, he slightly panicked: "Mar- Marshal, you did not know, due to the Southern Central inspector being placed

in the frontier, in order to prevent the mob from rioting, the imperial court had especially allowed one branch of the defensive army..."

Gu Yun: "The defensive army in this country, except for the imperial army of the Emperor — the others must not use any machinery above light armor or cavalry. Even the Heavy Armor of the imperial army cannot exceed six seals — Kuai Lan Tu, was it I who remembered it wrong? Or was it you?"

Kuai Lan Tu shivered.

Of course, he knew that he had stepped over the line, but this was not a grave matter. As long as they could defeat Fu Zhi Cheng and let the Drumming Order be implemented, this would be nothing more than a small offense under a much larger merit. Things had already come to this, there was no turning back anymore: "The traitor is right here, the Marquis truly wants to talk about private soldiers breaking regulation right now?"

Gu Yun frowned, almost appearing as if he wasn't very good at arguing face-to-face. Kuai Lan Tu immediately assumed he had managed to catch this expression flashing across his face, suddenly feeling that the Marquis of Order was not as terrifying as what the legend told of.

Kuai Lan Tu had nothing to fear, thinking to himself: *"In the end, he is simply a young man of nobility. Without the Old Marquis' faction, what the hell is one Gu Yun?"*

Fu Zhi Cheng furiously shouted: "This Kuai, who did you call a traitor?!"

Kuai Lan Tu raised his voice: "Gentlemen, we have been besieged by the rebels' force, the best solution right now is to capture their king, not allowing them any room to react! I also ask you all to please control your men, do not let the rebels run astray!"

Fu Zhi Cheng was angry to the point of laughing, causing his already unsightly face to resemble a demon: "Capture me? Go ahead and try!"

As he finished this, Fu Zhi Cheng's elite soldiers took the lead in launching a storm, rushing into the hall of the den from the foothills. The guards of the Southern Frontier Army and the inspector’s private soldiers clashed.

The small Xing Zi Lin nest was instantly crowded.

Shen Yi could not understand why Gu Yun was still pretending to be worthless, sitting and watching the scene. Shaken by the loud screams and shout, he had almost ran down the stairs. But as he turned around, he saw that Chang Geng's face did not change, his arrow never left Gu Yun's surroundings, anyone who dared to approach him would become a meat skewer.

"General Shen, please rest assured, yifu had already planned this, and I am also keeping watch right now." When Chang Geng spoke, there was a strange kind of certainty and assurance to his words.

For a moment, Shen Yi suddenly thought of an idea — Gu Yun had deliberately intensified the contradiction between Fu Zhi Cheng and Kuai Lan Tu, was he planning to get others to do his dirty work?

Chang Geng: "If today, Fu Zhi Cheng is captured, the position of the commander of the Southern Frontier army will be left open. Although the Emperor is persistent, he also understands what is of importance. The borderland is a critical territory, only grand generals are to be put in this position.

“Looking at the entirety of the imperial court, no one is more fitting than you, General Shen, when it comes to experience and qualification.

“Not to mention, The Emperor suppressing the right to control of my yifu was only due to his strong suspicious nature. The affections of growing up together from childhood still remained, Great Liang’s safety were still placed upon my yifu's shoulders.

“When the Drumming Order is implemented, the Black Tiger Emblem will be ineffective. Whoever becomes the commander of the Southern Frontier has the authority to control and manage but has no actual military power. Since yifu has already expressed his attitude,

should the Emperor not pacify him after his punishment?”

As he got here, Chang Geng paused and smiled: "General Shen, just wait and see, although the Emperor does not like this long lost younger brother very much, the reward for the holiday season certainly does not lack anything. When added up, they would perhaps be worth more than yifu's wage.”

Shen Yi ignored the complicated matter of *‘Who is the one raising this family?’*. He looked at Chang Geng with shock, his expressions changed several times, then in the end, he praised: "Your Royal Highness has changed so much."

At that time, the teenager who came out of the town of Yanhui was simple and stubborn, all his emotions from happiness to sorrows were clear at a glance. Shen Yi had secretly admired his determination many times — if it were to be any other ordinary child, transforming from a country boy to a prince in just one night, they would have been blinded by the vanity of the capital.

Chang Geng that year was just a child who had never tasted luxury and wealth, yet he had insisted on leaving the manor. He would rather wander under this endless sky than return to be a prince of royalty, a frog sitting at the bottom of a well.

But right now, the young man who was currently discussing the nation’s state of affairs with him in the midst of swords and blades was void of any trace of childishness from that year. His transformation had struck Shen Yi with awe.

Chang Geng did not respond. In the past four years, he had never dared to be lenient with both his body and soul for even a day, but not from the desire to make any grand contribution. He wanted to be strong as soon as possible, to quickly arrive at the day where he could have a casual conversation with the Bone of Impurity… to be strong enough to protect one person.

"Although the sea route is open, but Central Plains people rarely go out to sea. The naval defense is also lacking. If relying only on the foreigners to travel here to bring in trades, in the end, the ones who will largely profit from it are still these sea traveling merchants, the

meager amount of silver flowing in is not enough for the emperor to secretly buy *Ziliujin* from the hands of the Westerners.”

Shen Yi: "This is only momentary, it’s not impossible to find a way out."

Chang Geng seemed to smile: "Yes, I have traveled to see the Silk Road this spring, the entrance to Lou Lan was flourishing to the point of unbelievable. When I thought of how all this was made possible thanks to yifu's efforts, I could not help but feel very honored.

"Up to three years, then the Silk Road can be completely opened, connecting through the whole territory of Great Liang. Wait until the people can truly profit from it, there will be enough gold and silver flowing into the national treasury. At that time, the Ling Shu Institute will no longer have to worry about money. Defenders everywhere will have plenty of troops. Who would still dare to invade the Frontiers?

"If so, then whether the Ministry of War has the final say, or my yifu has the final say, in his eyes, there may be no difference at all."

Shen Yi was silent, he did not know why after being separated for five years, Chang Geng had come to understood Gu Yun even more.

But what he said was true.

In the past few years, Gu Yun still carried with him a raging murderous intent, quite often with no one around, he would talk of fighting this, fighting that. But since he was ordered to take over the Silk Road, he had mentioned these matters less and less.

On one hand, as he grew older, he had begun to think more and more, his anger had begun to fade. On the other hand — it was because Gu Yun who has never once thought about grasping the military power in his hands from beginning to end, what he wished for all his life was for his home country to be at peace.

If they needed him to fight, he was willing to don his armors and mount his steed. If they needed him to defend, he was willing to be a

lowly guard on the Silk Road.

T/N: these parts really tugged at my heart.
this is yifu's true character but unfortunately,
everyone are mostly suspicious of him.

Chang Geng saw that Shen Yi seemed to be lost in thought, he suddenly remembered something he had heard of before — it was said that the understanding and trust between a general and his mechanic was something that no other could get in between. Chang Geng's heart involuntarily felt envious. But before his jealousy could become concentrated, he suddenly heard the sound of wings flapping.

A bird stopped on the window sill. Chang Geng was momentarily surprised, then put away his bow and arrow. The bird flew over and landed in his palm. It was a very well crafted wooden bird, its neck can make flexible movements. It was adorable, appearing as if it was a living bird.

Shen Yi came from Ling Shu Institute, the bad habit of feeling his hands itching whenever he saw a craft he liked will accompany him for a lifetime. His eyes had never left the bird as soon as he saw it, but it was not convenient for him to ask Chang Geng for it either, driving himself to distress with wants and needs.

Chang Geng gently tapped a few times on the bird's belly. The wooden bird's abdomen popped out, revealing a roll of paper inside.

Chang Geng took a look, the face that remained stable even when the mountain exploded suddenly changed.

Shen Yi: "What is the matter?"

At this time, Gu Yun under the attic caught a glint of light from his peripheral vision. He raised his hand, but only to put his beautiful hand belonging to those young masters from prestigious nobility on the sword hanging at his waist.

A short and small-framed Southern Army soldier suddenly emerged and rushed straight towards Kuai Lan Tu — Gu Yun's Black Iron Camp guard immediately stepped up to save him.

Kuai Lan Tu had not had the time to feel relieved, the Southern Army soldier had opened his mouth to spit out something. He could instinctively feel that this was not right, but it was already too late to turn his head to dodge.

An arrow as large as a thumb pierced straight into his neck, at the same time, the Black Iron Camp guards smashed the head of the Southern Army soldier, appearing like they did not see the arrow that flew towards Master Kuai at all.

Kuai Lan tu's throat twitched violently, he reached out, as if wanting to grasp onto something —

In a split second, the assassin and the assassinated both perished at the same time.

Sun Jiao could not have predicted this even in his dream, he came tumbling back, crashing into the wall behind him in fright, and suddenly, Gu Yun showed him a smile.

In the next moment, a loud screech broke through the sky, the roof of the towering bandit lair was destroyed into half, countless Black Eagles came whistling down —

Kuai Lan Tu and Sun Jiao wanted to use Gu Yun to force Fu Zhicheng into rebelling. But unexpectedly, Gu Yun had not followed their plan. Before they could make their move, he had taken the lead to intensify the hostility between both sides, borrowing Fu Zhi Cheng’s hand to kill off the troublesome Kuai Lan Tu.

Then by some method, he had sneaked the Black Iron Camp into the Southern Frontier to later deal with Fu Zhi Cheng, killing two birds with one stone...

But this was not right.

Chang Geng turned and rushed down from the attic, this game did not stop here!

The one who started it all was not Kuai Lan Tu, not the Ministry of War, not Sun Jiao, and not even Gu Yun...

Chapter 43: Southern Sea

*1/23/2015 was Sha Po Lang's first update on jjwxc! It's been four years ^^*

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Chang Geng swallowed, his voice was tight, cautiously asking, "Yifu, can you lie on my lap?"

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Bandit leader Jing Xu was following the 'Southern Frontier soldier' who had come to inform him to save Fu Zhi Cheng and the situation, but after a while, this experienced old bandit discovered one problem — the one leading the way seemed to be bringing them to a place the bandits often used for 'knocking the bell'.

There were often such places in the southwestern mountains. The terrain was extremely complex, with mazes that were borne from nature, and except for the local snakes, no other could be able to make out the directions. There were countless dens underground. If the people inside were to set up an ambush, they could reach the level of unparalleled.

Mountain bandits generally would first try to trick people into such areas, then block off the escape and rob them. This kind of place was ideal for carrying it out. It was specially designed to deal with some famous cargo escorting crew or groups from the pugilist world, referring to in their slang as 'knocking the bell'.

Although Jing Xu was in a rush, his mind remained clear. Nearing the destination, he was shocked to realize that this place was a 'bell top'. With a layer of cold sweat on his back, he immediately stopped his footsteps and questioned the 'Southern Army soldier'. However, in just a few words, there had already been countless loopholes. The 'soldier' wanted to attack, but after being restrained by the bandits, he had drunk poison to committed suicide.

There was a burst of suspicion in Jing Xu's heart, he immediately ordered his men to turn around. On the way, he encountered two brothers from his camp, their body drenched in blood – only then did he know that his lair had been overturned. When they hurriedly rushed back, there was only the wreckage of broken rubbles and burnt corpses everywhere.

Ten years of accumulation, destroyed overnight.

"Big brother!" A bandit ran over and grabbed Jing Xu's arm. "Secret passage, don't panic, we still have the secret passage!"

There were many mountains in the southwest, most of the mountain bandits learned to build many dens, together with many secret passages in the mountains, allowing them to flee underground.

If the enemy pressed in on their mountain, they could pretend to fight back, then escape into the thousands of secret passages. Even the Black Eagle in the sky could not catch an underground rat.

When the others heard this, their eyes lit up.

But Jing Xu was swaying and shaking, his expression in a daze, no trace of happiness could be found.

He watched as his underlings went to search the secret passages with joy and hope – he knew that the secret passage was now useless.

If the other party intended only to kill people, then most of those on the mountain could escape along the secret passage. In any case, they could not shake the foundation of the lair, but they had actually burned the mountain instead.

Even Kuai Lan Tu did not know what it was that he had burned down.

Jing Xu stood motionlessly for a long time. Not far from him, there was a sudden burst of a sharp cry. He could hear the person who went to search for the secret road shouting in despair: "The secret passage had collapsed!"

Jing Xu closed his eyes — sure enough.

In this ordinary secret chamber under the mountain, what was stored not real gold and silver like in Xing Zi Lin, but *Ziliujin*.

The imperial court's *Ziliujin* distribution to the local garrison was incredibly limited, even the Black Iron Camp camp was no different than the rest, let alone the South Frontier garrison, but Fu Zhi Cheng certainly had his own way. Kuai Lan Tu received a secret report and learned that Fu Zhi Cheng and Jing Xu had a very close relationship — but he did not know that in truth, Jing Xu was the 'clerk' who smuggled *Ziliujin* for Fu Zhi Cheng.

The mountain bandits' business was robbing, doing whatever that could be beneficial to them. Jing Xu came in contact with the black market for Fu Zhi Cheng and smuggled the *Ziliujin*, it was impossible for him not to profit off of this, but he believed that he was not a greedy man, only keeping one part for himself each time. Fu Zhi Cheng was aware of this and had always been silently accepting.

Just before this, Jing Xu just sent the latest batch of *Ziliujin* to the army of the Southern Frontier. In the secret room under the mountain, there was only just a surplus of 10% of the *Ziliujin*, who would have known that it would become a life-claiming talisman, for after igniting, it had exploded in the secret passage in the mountain, annihilating and wiping out the entire lair.

Was this a coincidence? This could be a coincidence?

Jing Xu remembered a long time ago, someone had told him: *'the righteousness are well versed in morals, the wickedness are well versed in profit - those who gathered due to profit, will be scattered by profit'.*

He and Fu Zhi Cheng were gathered together for profit, now that this matter had been uncovered, Fu Zhi Cheng, of course, could also easily abandon him. Bandits were plentiful on these mountains, get rid of one Jing Xu, he could still raise countless of others to replace him.

Someone ran up to him and said in a choked up voice: "Big brother, let's dig up the secret passage, maybe there are still some survivors left."

Jing Xu stood there with indifference, shaking his head.

"Big brother!"

The sounds of crying broke out from all sides, Jing Xu suddenly shouted: "Enough!"

All the surviving bandits stood on the scorched surface of the ground and looked at him.

"Follow me." The eyes of Jing Xu gradually become red, like a beast that was ready to bite someone. He pressed his voice low through his teeth. "If Fu Zhi Cheng is not benevolent, don't blame me for being unjust — after these many years, does he truly think I do not have any ways to deal with him?"

"The Southern Frontier has many mountains and many hideouts. These mountains' bandits had formed a system, they do not act independently. As far as we know, there are three big bandit leaders."

In Xing Zi Lin, Chang Geng took out a leather map. It had been tattered from being flipped through many times, he pointed out for Gu Yun. The marks on it were extremely complicated, from the terrain, the climate, what type of road, what type of horses could be used to travel on them, so on and so forth.

Such a drawing, Gu Yun had seen it before in Jiangnan. This was undoubtedly the pen of the Lin Yuan Pavilion. He looked at Chang Geng thoughtfully under the oil lamp, he did not respond, indicating for him to continue.

Gu Yun let three thousand Black Iron Camp soldiers mix in with the caravans returning home from the north. Using smoke as a signal, they had secretly made their way through at night and swooped in from the sky when the guards of Kuai Lan Tu had surrounded Fu Zhi Cheng, more than twenty killers of the sky controlled the situation of

dogs biting other dogs. They were divided into two ways, the tens thousands of Southern army troops stationed at the foot of the mountain were separated into several sections.

Their commander had been captured, the Black Iron Camp had also arrived in person. The Southern Frontier garrison, although having many soldiers, resembled a group of sheep who could not resist, submitting to Gu Yun as a result.

When a commander did not lead his troops with the intention to kill but to feel more courageous, then no matter what kind of tiger or wolf were behind them, they would become nothing more than sheep.

However, this chaos in Xing Zi Lin was not even finished, yet Chang Geng had brought another news.

Chang Geng: "The forces of these three leaders divided the Southern Frontier into three territories. They are normally at peace, each of them restrained their own underlings, all were more or less connected with the troops stationed in the south. The most special one is the priest Jing Xu from the north."

Shen Yi asked: "Why is this person special, is he the most powerful? Or is he the closest to Fu Zhi Cheng?"

Chang Geng: "Because he smuggled *Ziliujin* for General Fu."

Gu Yun narrowed his eyes and looked up: "How did you know this? In the end, what are you doing in the southwest this time?"

Four years ago, when Liao Ran led him to Jiangnan, Gu Yun already had a speculation. The Lin Yuan Pavilion was in the vast pugilist world, it was impossible to fully monitor the exchanges of the court's officials. The reason why they could find traces of the Eastern Sea disaster, it was through tracking the *Ziliujin* black market.

Chang Geng smiled a little, he seemed to be reluctant to say more and only replied: "People from the pugilist world have their own methods, yifu does not have to worry."

Gu Yun raised his hand to stop him, his expression darkened:

"You should know what kind of crime is smuggling *Ziliujin* — getting captured would mean death. The *Ziliujin* black markets are full of those who risk their lives, the righteous do not stand under a wall that is about to collapse, do you understand?"

Shen Yi who was standing on the side was immensely embarrassed as he heard this, almost wanting to blush in Marshal Gu's stead. Using such righteous words when teaching others, as if that the smuggling of *Ziliujin* did not have anything to do with him!

Chang Geng did not fight with him, nor did he get angry. He only looked at him with a smile, his face was clearly expressing: *"I already knew of this little matter of yours, there are outsiders here, it was not convenient to speak of it out loud."*

Gu Yu was first startled, then he immediately realized: *"What? This little bastard even investigated me?"*

Chang Geng held down Gu Yun's hand: "Yifu, don't be angry, listen to me first."

Chang Geng put his palm on the back of Gu Yun's hand. His hand was warm, the joints were well-defined, grasping with the gentle strength of holding a hatchling, letting go as soon as he held it. No one knew why, but it felt rather strange.

Gu Yun suddenly felt a bit awkward. Between friends and brothers, if having a close enough relationship, they would hug, jokingly hold hands, and even a kiss was not a problem. Military commanders did not pay much attention to trivial courtesy, this was especially true for the soldiers in the army, but this gesture of Chang Geng... was a bit too 'intimate', Gu Yun unconsciously retracted his fingers, momentarily forgetting what he wanted to say.

Chang Geng's face was unchanging: "Ge Chen used a wooden bird to send a letter to me just now, saying that Jing Xu's mountain had been burned."

Gu Yun: "... Ge Chen?"

Chang Geng: "It is Ge Ban Xiao."

Gu Yan glanced at Sun Jiao. Since Kuai Lan Tu lost his life and Fu Zhi Cheng got arrested, Master Sun had become a fragile and poor little bird. Except for trembling, there was nothing else he could do. Gu Yun had to find people to watch over him.

This matter was easy to understand as soon as one thought about it.

Fu Zhi Cheng was soon aware of Gu Yun's whereabouts. If he truly wanted to brush off his relationship with the bandits, why would he decide to act in this critical moment? Was it not the same as proving himself guilty before even being accused?

Recalling Sun Jiao's moronic display of 'I have been colluding with Inspector Kuai' from the beginning to the end, it was all clear at a glance – in order for the Ministry of War to forcefully promote the Drumming Order, and for Kuai Lan Tu to remove Fu Zhi Cheng, they had joined forces with each other, fabricated a conflict between Fu Zhi Cheng and the bandits, let them fight among themselves in front of the Marquis. When that time came, even if Gu Yun wished to protect Fu Zhi Cheng, there was already no other way for him to reverse the tide.

The inhumane action of setting fire to the mountains was undoubtedly the work of Kuai Lan Tu.

However, it was impossible for Kuai Lan Tu to have known the true relationship between Jing Xu and Fu Zhi Cheng. Otherwise, he would not set fire to burn the mountain, because even if there were clear pieces of evidence of Fu Zhi Cheng's collusion with the bandits, this crime may not be enough to put the Southern Frontier's commander and governor to his death.

If Kuai Lan Tu knew that Fu Zhi Cheng smuggled *Ziliujin* through Jing Xu, he absolutely would not destroy the evidence for them — the smuggling of *Ziliujin* was considered to be the same as rebellion, even killing ten Fu Zhi Chengs was not enough.

"The *Ziliujin* black market has three sources," said Chang Geng. "The first is from the officials' storage. Although the regulation is strict, there are always rats who are willing to take risks for profit.

They steal from the officials stock, mix in various impurities, then spread them out. The second is from the 'black gold merchants', these are those who are desperate enough to travel outside the country to look for the *Ziliujin* mine, risking their lives digging them up; the third is from overseas, the reason why we came to check this line especially is because the ultimate source of *Ziliujin* is from the Southern Sea."

Gu Yun sat up straight: "Are you sure?"

Chang Geng nodded silently.

Shen Yi's expression had also become grave.

They all knew that the Southern Sea did not produce *Ziliujin*.

Ziliujin from overseas flowing into the big black market – were directly traded with the foreigners. It was a fixed line, with a fixed group of people. They would not be transported from someone else's location due to the risk being too high.

If someone truly was using the Southern Sea as a cover, to control the southwest *Ziliujin* black market from across the distance – those behind it who took such big risk, hiding away so deep, their objective certainly was not just buying and selling *Ziliujin*.

Chang Geng: "The Southern Sea is not in China, we also have limited ability. We had sent people to the Southern Sea several times, they had all returned in vain. This is one thing, there was also the priest Jing Xu who has yet to make his appearance. Yifu, I think that when a savage bandit had been exposed to *Ziliujin*, he would never think of finding the farming puppets to do fieldworks on the mountain."

After listening, Gu Yun was quiet for a moment, then he stood up and blew a long whistle. A Black Eagle quietly descended from the sky and landed in front of him.

Gu Yun's brow was slightly crunched up, he then gave out three orders in the blink of an eye.

"Two teams of Black Eagle scouts take this map, investigate the

territories of the three major bandit leaders of the Southern Frontier, we must first capture the leaders!"

"Imprison the defensive troops of the Inspector, thoroughly find out who had drawn out this plan for Kuai Lan Tu and let him use this method to provoke Fu Zhi Cheng and the bandits."

"Interrogate Fu Zhi Cheng, Ji Ping, you go."

Everyone took their leave as they received their orders. After Gu Yun finished, he could not help but narrow his eyes. Even Shen Yi hadn't noticed something was wrong, yet Chang Geng had already pulled him: "Yifu, isn't it... Did you bring your medicine? It will get brighter soon, let's take a break first?"

Shen Yi was only able to came back to reality as he heard the word 'medicine'. At the same time, he had a strange feeling inside. Chang Geng's eyes seemed to be glued to Gu Yun, detecting even his slightest of movement.

Gu Yun wanted to deny by habit.

Chang Geng spoke first: "I still have not tried out the acupuncture method that Miss Chen showed me last time. This matter may not be finished yet. I am afraid there could be more developments, yifu please let me try."

Gu Yun now remembered that Chang Geng had already known, trying to hide any further was only useless. He left behind a sentence, "I will go rest in the back for a while" then silently followed him.

Chang Geng's bag carried a set of silver needles, some common medicines, broken pieces of silver, and a few books — Gu Yun had soon discovered that this child might appear sharp and well-dressed, but in truth, he only had with him two sets of elegant articles of clothing to change into.

Gu Yun could not comprehend, when Chang Geng was a child, even taking him out to the market required every trick he had. In the end, for what reason must he insist on leaving the capital, living the days of wandering and tasting hardships?

It could be a fresh experience for a month and two, would it still be fresh even after four years?

Chang Geng had performed acupuncture for many people before, but at this time, facing Gu Yun alone, he could not help himself from tensing up irrationally. He hadn't felt this way even when he followed Miss Chen to learn acupuncture for the first time and performing it on himself. He unconsciously repeatedly washed his hands over and over, almost washing away the skin, until Gu Yun could not wait anymore, urging him: "Miss Chen had been teaching you this long, did she only teach you how to wash your hands?"

Chang Geng swallowed, his voice was tight, cautiously asking, "Yifu, can you lie on my lap?"

Gu Yun did not think there was anything wrong with it, after all, this was not a lady's legs, there was nothing to be afraid of. But he had really wanted to ask 'could you actually do this?' — but he was afraid his words would increase the pressure for the half-hearted doctor Chang Geng. Swallowing his question down in the end, he just thought generously: *"What is there to fear, I could not die anyway."*

He had prepared to feel needles on his flesh, but Chang Geng was not at all as unskilled as his imagination. The very fine needles pinned on his acupuncture points basically had no sensation. After a while, the familiar headaches arrived again, there was no telling if it was a psychological effect, but Gu Yun truly did feel much better.

Gu Yun relaxed his body, he couldn't help but ask: "You followed the Lin Yuan Pavilion throughout many hardships, what is it that you hope to achieve?"

If he truly wanted to serve the country, he should be returning to the imperial court to act as a *Jun Wang*. Being a prince, for what reason must he follow those life-risking people from the pugilist world to investigate about *Ziliujin*?

Chang Geng paused, the movements of his wrist did not stop. He skillfully dodged the question: "I have not asked yifu where the poisonous wounds of your eyes and ears come from."

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng smiled, assuming that he was able to block him off. Unexpectedly, after a moment, Gu Yun suddenly calmly said: "When I was a child, the old Marquis took me to the battlefield in the Northern Frontier, a poisonous arrow of the barbarians had grazed my skin."

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun: "I'm finished, your turn."

Gu Yun, this person, no matter whether he was playing the role of a wolf or a righteous being, he was an expert all the same. Speaking a few words with no expression, truth and false entangled, leaving no traces to uncover. Chang Geng could only rely on his intuition, feeling that there must be lies in his words.

"I... I wanted to see for myself," Chang Geng said. "Master Liao Ran had said to me before, if one's heart is as vast as heaven and earth, any troubles will become only a small corner. Mountains and rivers, all living things, if one often look at others, then when bowing their head, they could also see themselves. If one has not taken care of a dying patient, one would think that a scratch on the skin was a grave injury. If one has not eaten a mouthful of rocks and sand, one would still think that iron troops and golden spears were a majestic shadow. If one has not tasted poverty, then complaining about the 'hardships of thousand households' is nothing more than just lamenting without being ill."

Gu Yun looked at him.

Gu Yun's gaze gradually recovered the focus point under the effect of the acupuncture. Chang Geng slightly hid away it at first, then came back to his senses and calmly met his gaze, but he could not look into Gu Yun's eyes for too long — his chest seemed to have a golden box inside, its heat could never dissipate, scorching hot. His back itched, he unconsciously closed his legs, almost not able to sit still.

Gu Yun suddenly said: "Your teacher's surname is Zhong, Zhong

Xiang, right?"

Chang Geng was surprised.

"A grand general, his horseback archery skills and martial arts were unparalleled. Ten years ago, he had committed a sin due to him opposing the former Emperor, all of the imperial court magistrates and officials had pleaded for him. In the end, he was only dismissed from office and was not imprisoned.

"When the Western Region rebelled, in a panic, the Emperor had thought of welcoming the old veteran back to his position, but could no longer find him. "

Gu Yun sighed. "As soon as I saw that arrow you shot, I already knew that it was his teaching — no wonder all the people I sent after you ended up being shaken off. Is the old man's body still tough?"

Chang Geng made a sound in response.

Gu Yun did not say a word for a long moment.

He did not tell Chang Geng — in fact, a long time ago, Zhong Xiang was once his own teacher as well. Lin Yuan Pavilion had introduced Chang Geng to him. Is it a coincidence? Or intentional?

He couldn't help but look forward to it - the little prince that he had raised from the age of ten, could he now finally grow into being a pillar?

Gu Yun fell asleep during his train of thoughts, vaguely having a feeling as if someone had caressed his face.

When he woke up again, the sky was already bright. He pushed away the thin blanket on his body, not knowing who had placed it on for him. Asking in a low voice: " What's the matter?"

The Black Eagle at the door: "Marshal, the three bandits leaders gathered together at night, forming a rebel mob near the river to the south..."

Gu Yun frowned.

"They have ten *Baihong* arrows, dozens of Heavy Armors. If your subordinate was not mistaken, these mobs even have 'Eagles' in their hands."

Chapter 44: Contest

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With this divine bird in his hands, what the hell was the Marquis of Order?

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This one sentence of the Black Eagle scout had fully awakened Gu Yun.

"Eagle," he asked again in a low voice. "You truly weren't mistaken?"

Black Eagle scout: "Your subordinate can guarantee with his own head — this is true."

'Eagle' was the most unique of all the military services. Although it was not the one to burn through the most fuel, it was extremely difficult to maintain and care for, they required to be repaired by the experts from the Ling Shu Institute every year, the total cost certainly would not be cheaper than Heavy Armors.

In contrast, Heavy Armors were much more commonly seen. In various military troops, even Kuai Lan Tu's guards have several sets of armors that had surpassed the authorized level. However, looking at the entirety of Great Liang, only one Eagle faction — The Black Eagle — could be fully developed.

Where did the Eagles of these bandits come from?

Stolen from the Black Iron Camp?

Gu Yun stood up and strode outside. People in the Xing Zi Lin den were tense. Fu Zhi Cheng who had been stripped off of his weapon was kneeling in the middle, shouted loudly as he saw Gu Yun: "Marshal! Marshal, I have been wronged!"

Gu Yun lifted his leg and kicked him in the middle of the chest. Fu Zhi Cheng, a strong and sturdy man, was sent flying. He spat out a

mouthful of blood, coughing and rolling on the ground, unable to speak.

"You have been wronged?" Gu Yun said coldly, "Bastard, you have raised a group of rebels right under your nose, Light and Heavy Armors, *Baihong* arrows set up for two miles, even the 'Eagle' can be obtained. Compared to the Jiangnan Navy, this is still much more lavish. You have quite the abilities Fu Zhi Cheng!"

Fu Zhi Cheng struggled on the ground, his look of surprise did not seem to be a false pretense. He continuously pleaded: "Marshal, I swear to the sky, I don't know where their iron Eagle comes from, even my Southern Frontier garrison has no Eagle!"

Shen Yi whispered: "Marshal, I had tried to investigate him for a night, even General Fu himself could not tell the origin of all the *Ziliujin*. He only admitted to telling Jing Xu to go contact people."

"This idiot, conspiring with a tiger yet still thinking he raised a cat." Gu Yun stared at Fu Zhi Cheng for a moment. "Continue to investigate, get the map — all troops get ready, prepare to encircle the rebels, the Southern Frontier garrison temporarily will be under my command for the time being, any offender will be punished by military law!"

He talked as he reached out and equipped his armor, but he could not find his bow when he searched around for it. Only then did he remember that his bow and arrow had been gifted to Chang Geng.

Gu Yun was slightly startled, asking: "Where is Chang Geng?"

At this time, Jing Xu was quickly passing through the long and endless secret path inside the mountain, where an individual was already waiting for him.

He was a tall man. His facial features under the steam lamp were as sharp as a knife. There was a deep wrinkle by the corner of the

mouth. His exact age could not be seen, and there was no telling which foreign country he came from. In short, he was not of the Central Plains.

His face was tanned from the sun, and the skin that was exposed to the outside was wrapped in a layer of weather-beaten color. His slightly blue eyes were staring at a large sand table.

In the face of this person, Jing Xu showed extreme cautiousness: "Master Ja, will that Gu Yun fall into the trap?"

'Master Ja' lifted his face and looked at Jing Xu: "You may be able to trick him into coming, but it is impossible to hold him off. The Marquis of Order had been on the battlefield since he was a child. He only needs to take one look to know that those steel armors flying in the sky and running on the ground of yours does not have any true fighting power against the Black Iron Camp."

Jing Xu: "Then..."

Master Ja lifted a finger: "Remember what I had told you, the Black Iron Camp was built by three generations of people. It is one of the world's top class military force, a malicious weapon that had leaped beyond our time. Do not harbor any hope that you could challenge them directly, it will be nothing more than a giant fighting a child. What we have to do is just briefly lead the tiger away from the mountain and delay them for a moment."

His fingers lightly tapped on sand table: "Gu Yun will be led here by the Eagles and Heavy Armors we have left in the light, although we can't hold him off for a long time — but I just got a message, Fu Zhi Cheng had partially helped you, he had drawn most of the troops to Xing Zi Lin. Now the internal defense of the troops stationed in southern frontier garrison is completely empty, and the people left behind don't even know that you have switched sides."

Jing Xu's eyes brightened up.

"You only need to do what you have done every time when smuggling *Ziliujin* for Fu Zhi Cheng, hide people in the delivery box,

those in the southwest storage will not stop you nor reveal themselves. When that time comes, both sides from inside and out will assist one another." Master Ja made a movement of slashing down, "Within the time to finish a cup of tea, you can already take over the southwest storage."

There were a large number of *Ziliujin* in the southwestern storage area. As long as one person stood there with a torch, let alone the Black Iron Camp, even the gods will not dare take a step further.

"There are thousands of pounds of *Ziliujin* there. Once they are burned, even the Marquis of Order himself could not carry this crime." Master Ja gently swayed the steam lamp hanging on the sand table, causing his eyes to flicker in the dark, his lips revealed an unfathomable smile. "You will have a lot of room to negotiate with the court."

Their plans could not be said to have an opening, but at this time on the land of Southern Frontier, there was another force that has not come out yet.

Before the Black Iron Camp made their move, Chang Geng in Xing Zi Lin received a second wooden bird.

The first one that flew here was released immediately. Shen Yi did not even get to touch one of its feathers. Seeing the second bird fly in, Shen Yi's drool was flowing three feet long, he eagerly came closer, rubbing his hands together: "Your Highness, you see ... can I open this one for you?"

Chang Geng generously handed it to him. The wooden bird truly was as good as real. When held in his hands, apart from the hardness that differentiated it from a real bird, there was no other difference.

Shen Yi held the divine bird with both of his palms, feeling that

his heart was about to melt: "It knew how to nod and even how to peck!"

"..." Gu Yun: "Old maid, don't do anything embarrassing."

With this divine bird in his hands, what the hell was the Marquis of Order?

Shen Yi did not pay him any mind. Touching the back of the wooden bird with passion, he carefully looked for the mechanism on its belly.

Shen Yi: "Then I'll open it now."

Chang Geng: "Wait, you must first shake..."

He didn't finish his words yet Shen Yi had already removed the belly of the wooden bird. Turned out, this small little belly hid a secret. As soon as the cover was opened, a piece of paper bounced out like a cannonball, knocking against General Shen's straight nose bridge, almost causing a nosebleed, then covered his face in the blink of an eye.

Shen Yi: "..."

A bird as large as a palm hid a piece of paper that covered the entire wall.

"You have to shake it first," Chang Geng would now have the opportunity to finish his words, "Because the space in a bird's belly is limited, sometimes people will use 'sea grain paper'..."

When Shen Yi heard this, regardless of the tears that were still in his eyes from getting hit, he continued to be lengthy: "Oh, sea grain paper! I know this one! It is a type of paper made using a special technique. No matter how large its size is, it can be pressed into a pill. The ink will not fade away, and it will even restore itself when left out for a long time!"

There was nothing in the world that can stop General Shen's incessant explanations, not even a bloody nose.

"Why didn't it just break his mouth?" Gu Yun thought without sympathy, grabbing the piece of paper that resembled a weapon.

It was a drawing of an 'Eagle' — from the two wings to the golden box, and even the protective mask, all were painted in a realistic and detailed manner, signed with a big character 'Ge'.

"This is the Eagle in the bandit's hand?" Although Gu Yun was not a Mechanic, but every variety of battle armors was also a half of his body. He could see at a glance what was the difference between the Black Eagle and the Eagle on the drawing: "They have cut down too much on materials."

Shen Yi covered his nose, took a look and said: "I think compared to a Black Eagle, its weight is lighter by at least one suit of Light Armor, perhaps they wanted to save fuel."

"Even paper kite is more fuel-efficient — " Gu Yun said, his sentence was not yet finished when his expression suddenly changed. "Hold on!"

Although this Eagle was nothing more than an embroidered pillow, its designer was undoubtedly aware of the working mechanism of Eagles, they must have known that this armor had no combat power. The other side was hanging these Eagles up so high, they were undoubtedly intending to lead the tiger away from the mountain.

The question was where was this 'mountain'?

There was a saying that when fighting a snake, one must hit seven inches from its head. The question was, where was the Southern Frontier garrison's ...and even Gu Yun's own heart placed?

**there is a saying that a snake's heart is placed about seven inches from its head.*

Gu Yun suddenly turned to Fu Zhi Cheng: "Where do you usually let the bandits send *Ziliujin* to?"

Fu Zhi Cheng's face was covered in blood, he looked at Gu Yun in confusion for a moment, then could finally react to what was happening. His face showed a wandering look — admitting to smuggling *Ziliujin*, was it not the same as securing yourself to the crime of rebellion?

At this moment, Chang Geng gently said behind Gu Yun: "General Fu must think clearly, Inspector Kuai has died in your hand, there was Master Sun of the Ministry of War as a witness, your crime of rebelling and murdering was for certain regardless of any reason. A person who is bound to die, what is the difference between dying in the capital and simply dying here?"

Fu Zhi Cheng had never seen such a gentle and elegant person like His Highness. When he first saw this young man, he might have suspected that he could not even move a barrel. However, at this time, he had no doubt that if he did not cooperate, the 'scholarly' Fourth Prince could kill him with one sword.

Gu Yun continued in a timely manner: "If you understand your situation, you still have the opportunity to atone for your sins and do the right things."

Fu Zhi Cheng's lips trembled for a long while, his voice was unstable: "The southwest storage, I do not have any other place, I have always let Jing Xu send *Ziliujin* here, I did not move to my manor even a single drop."

Gu Yun stood up.

"Marshal!" Fu Zhicheng suddenly shouted at him. "This surname Fu had murdered and set fire, digging the tombs and turning the graves, there were no wicked things I haven't done, but with the order to station in the Southern Frontier, I have been working hard and stayed diligent, I have never harbored ulterior motives. I myself felt that I had never disappointed His Majesty, but now it has fallen into this ending, what might other comrades and brothers think if they were to know! Marshal, what do you think in your heart?"

Gu Yun gave him a deep look.

For a moment, Fu Zhi Cheng thought he had managed to touch Gu Yun.

However, Gu Yun was neither provoked by his emotions nor was he angered. His face seemed to be covered with a mask that could not be penetrated even by raging wind and storm, turning to leave: "Can you control what I think?"

"Ji Ping, you take the Eagles and move one step ahead, be sure to take over the southwestern storage before the bandits, Xiao An —"

The little Black Iron Camp soldier who followed Chang Geng in Sichuan stepped out of line as he was called.

Gu Yun: "Lead a branch of the Southern Frontier garrison troops and pretend to attack the hills where the bandits gathered."

Xiao An: "Roger!"

"Wait," Gu Yun said. "Take their armor and splash a bit of black ink on them. It doesn't have to be very realistic, just be flexible."

This trick was learned from Liao Ran. Xiao An was startled at first, then immediately understood Gu Yun's intention and ran away with joy.

The three major bandit leaders in the Southern Frontier have already finished examining their subordinates, Jing Xu looked at the soundless group of bandits before him. In an instant, he also felt the pride and exhilaration of holding a thousand troops in his hands.

He made a praying gesture to the sky above and raised his voice: "The local garrisons had let their armors run rampant. The Black Iron Camp resemble a demon crow descending from the sky, their fame running across overseas. Great Liang's military is this strong.

However, in the past ten years, Fujian and Jiangnan Navy had both previously rebelled, what is the reason for this?

"If it was not because of an incompetent ruler in power, letting sugarcoating subjects running rampant, why must us commoners be like a moth into the fire and put our lives on the line? Today, us brothers have been forced into a dead end, our lives and the lives of our families had been placed onto thin ice, only the path towards death was left under our feet.

"But if we do not risk death, how could we find the hope for surviving? Are you gentlemen willing to join me by blood, to seek a common cause, to share blessings and to shoulder disasters together?"

The mountain bandits only ever robbed for all their lifetime, the number of words they recognized were not as many as their own fingers. Jing Xu's calm voice had caused blood to rush to their heads in an instant, feeling as if they have placed themselves into the ranks of royalties.

Jing Xu took over a wine cup handed to him by one of his men, downed it in one go and dropped the cup to the ground: "Success or failure is set onto this one move!"

The bandits all drank to gain courage, smashing their cups, and moving out of the spacious secret chamber one after another.

Jing Xu turned to look at Master Ja. This mysterious foreigner once acted as a connection from the Southern Sea when he smuggled *Ziliujin* for Fu Zhi Cheng. He had lived in Central Plains for who knew how many years, extremely intelligent.

Just now as Master Ja listened to Jing Xu's speech of courage that arose from the bottom of his heart, there was not even a slight hint of change on his face. The steam lamp deepened and extended the crease on his face, standing in a place that was neither light nor dark, revealing a slight smile of mockery.

The first time Jing Xu cut one part of *Ziliujin* from Fu Zhi Cheng, he had wanted to sell it through Master Ja, in exchange for gold and silver to sleep on every day. At that time, Master Ja would

wholeheartedly persuade him to keep all these Ziliujin, to transfer them to another safer place, then to start to gather weaponry. He even advised him not to store the collected armors and weapons in the same place as the money.

As it turned out, this unpredictable foreigner seemed to have long anticipated the current situation.

A question suddenly arose in the heart of Jing Xu, the suspicious bandit leader. He thought: *"Is this Master Ja truly only a snakehead in selling Ziliujin?"*

At this moment, one of his men suddenly came to report: "Big brother, I can see a person wearing black armor coming up to the place where we left the Eagle!"

The doubts that just sprouted in his heart were overwhelmed by ecstasy: "Master Ja is right, they did indeed get fooled, enable the *Baihong* bow. Hold them off for however long we can! The entire army accelerates as planned! Quickly! "

At this moment, a team of unnoticeable escorts of *Ziliujin* was quietly approaching the southwestern storage. At the entrance, the man leading pushed up his protective mask slightly, revealing his face to the squad leader, "It is me."

With the smuggling of *Ziliujin*, the less people knew, the better. Therefore, Jing Xu on the delivery side and Fu Zhi Cheng on the receiving side all used fixed confidants of their own. The squad leader of the storage served as a connection to the bandits from inside the Southern garrison. Fu Zhi Cheng had asked him to never make any sound each time he received the *Ziliujin*, everything must be carried out in silence.

According to the usual practice, the captain would not ask a

single question in front of them, waving his hand with a natural expression and letting them in. Moreover, he would familiarly walk with them to the *Ziliujin* warehouse. But today, after the captain walked for two steps, no one knew which ghost had possessed him, he abruptly asked: "I remember you people just sent a batch a few days ago, how come there was another delivery so fast?"

The entire face of the bandit escorting *Ziliujin* was hidden under the mask, he said with a sullen voice: "This is a matter between the Master and big brother. How can I know?"

Somehow the captain was somewhat in a trance, speaking while searching for the keys: "To tell you the truth, our Master had moved more than half of the people with him yesterday, no one knows what had happened."

The bandit wearing the helmet stared at his movement of opening of the warehouse, subconsciously licking his mouth, rudely urging: "We are all running errands here, we do not know either, open the door!"

The captain's hand twisting the key suddenly stopped, he turned back and frowned: "How do I feel that you are today..."

His voice went silent, he could see a bandit aiming a small bow at his throat three steps away.

The captain shivered, and the mountain bandit having immediately known that they have been discovered simply decided to finish the job. The leader flipped his hand, the short arrow on the bow rushed into the squad captain's throat. The breath he inhaled preparing to shout finally had no chance to come out again.

The bandit with the helmet stepped forward, grabbed the fallen captain's body by his shoulders, and reached for the key on the warehouse door —

His heart was about to jump off from the chest — because as soon as this door was opened, tens of thousands of troops from the Southern Frontier, three thousand black iron crows, all of them

would be under his mercy.

At this moment, he suddenly heard a screech by his ear. The bandit had yet to come back to his senses from the excitement, and as he looked back unconsciously, he saw that his men were all frightened. It was only then that he felt that his arm was not right—the hand that was holding the keys had been pierced by an iron arrow that descended from the sky, only one inch of flesh was still connected with the arm.

Half of the exploded hand held the key of the warehouse tightly, blocking the way, unable to turn.

The bandit finally gave out a scream that was unlike a human voice.

With only such a short delay, the Eagles catching up to them had arrived. Having not put away the bow and arrow, Shen Yi directly landed on the top of the *Ziliujin* warehouse, taking out the Black Tiger Emblem. A rope was dangling under it — as if to get two for the price of one — where the very first Drumming Order of Great Liang hung.

He stood tall, behind the Eagle Armor was a pair of black wings as dark as a cloud, saying to the Southern garrison troops in the storage currently in a state of shock: "The Black Tiger emblem and the Drumming Order are here. Under the command of the Marquis of Order, I will be taking over the authority of the southwest storage. This place is now under restrictions, any criminals will be slain on the spot!"

The three Southern Frontier bandit leaders still weren't aware that the situation had changed. At this time, they were divided into three routes, leading their underlings drilling out from the ground, eagerly rushing to the southwest.

At this moment, Jing Xu suddenly heard a sound of clashing metal, as if heavy objects colliding with stones were rolling down

from the mountain, he looked up unconsciously —

A human head wrapped in Heavy Armor rolled off the hillside.

This Heavy Armor was hidden by himself in the *Ziliujin* escort cart, intending to sneak into the southwest storage.

Jing Xu went stiff —

He could only see the Southern Frontier garrison troops in the mountain's plains, with black iron armors hidden inside. Countless sharp arrows were pointed at them from the top of the mountain — at this moment, the other half of Jing Xu's force was still stuck inside the secret passage.

Chapter 45: Explosive

T/N: this chap is intense at first but gets uwu cuter later down.

—

Chang Geng was quick to react and caught it in time. He discovered that it was actually a bamboo flute made with very simple and coarse craftsmanship.

—

Regarding Jing Xu, Gu Yun took one look at him and found that there were redeeming qualities, he quickly grouped this major bandit leader with the others and thrown them to the side. At this time, he was more concerned about when Chang Geng would go.

It happened that Chang Geng had expressed very timely that he was going to meet up with his companions who were investigating the mountain's secret passages. Gu Yun felt greatly relieved inside. On the surface, he had still given him a handful of Black Iron Camp soldiers, telling him to be careful of the bandits that slipped through the net.

Watching him leave, Gu Yun said to a Black Cavalry at the side: "Look for two people to keep watch, if His Highness returned too quickly, give him something to do, don't let him come here."

The soldier took his order and left, Gu Yun finally retracted his gaze.

He swept a glance through the squad of captured bandits from beginning to the end, his eyes contained a severity unlike usual days: "I have only one question, how many entrances and exits do you have in these underground rats' nest? Please be aware of your current situation. Let's do it this way, starting from the first person on the west side, behead on the spot if he does not talk. When the first person is finished, the latter can add more details. If one was not able

to add anything more, then I am sorry. The ones at the front of the line can still have some advantage — let's start, counting to three, not talking will result in being cut down, talking nonsense will also be cut down."

The bandits were stunned in fear by the Marquis of Order who was more savage than the bandits themselves.

The Black Cavalry who was instructed to interrogate began to expressionlessly ask from the first person. The first person instinctively looked back and forth, unable to decide.

Gu Yun did not hesitate to make a downward gesture, the Wind Slasher in the hands of the Cavalry started to move.

The Cavalry usually only knew how to kill people, has not raised monkeys, and did not study the method of beheading either. The Wind Slasher's blades turned around the neck of the bandit, but unfortunately, it got stuck in the bone of the neck joint. The head of the bandit was half-intact, half-splitted, his vocal pipe had not been cut through yet, and his bloodcurdling screams frightened the flock of birds near and far in the mountains.

The Cavalry squinted his eyes, added a force to his wrist, ending the life of the unfortunate man.

The blood from his veins spurted out like springs, splashing onto the person next to him. The second bandit trembled greatly like an overloaded golden box, his mind was a complete blank, shakily pointing towards at the back: "There, there is one there..."

Gu Yun sneered: "Nonsense, can I not see if for myself?"

The second head fell to the ground.

The third bandit was frightened by the horror of the half-cut head to the point of wetting himself, he slammed to the ground and held his head in both hands. In fear of the executioner dressed in black directly cutting him down, he had revealed in one breath ten exits and entrances of the secret passages, the stares of people behind him were about to shoot through his back.

With this man serving as an opening, the rest was simple. On the road of life or death, it was useless to keep secrets. The people behind would inevitably reveal them, speaking up soon to preserve your life was the way to go.

Gu Yun was quiet, but in his heart, he was truly shocked by the large roots of the Southern Frontier bandits. Some of the entrances and exits of these mountains have already been discovered by the Lin Yuan Pavilion. Otherwise, even the Black Iron Camp could not manage to block these rats easily halfway through, but there were more that even the Lin Yuan Pavilion have not known of.

Behind him, the Black Iron Camp soldiers quietly left to verify whether these entrances and exits were true and to keep guard of every secret passage opening. Less than the time it took to burn an incense, as if playing the game of ‘pass the flower’*, the bandits had confessed all the underground routes that extended in all directions, down to the littlest ones.

*game in which players
sit in a circle passing a flower
around while a drum is beaten

In the blink of an eye, this deadly ‘flower’ had been passed to the one that started it all: leader Jing Xu.

In this life, Jing Xu had violently cut through from a pile of corpses to become the king of the mountain. There was no such thing as great talents, but there was certainly no shortage of courage and ruthless methods. Seeing the tip of the blade had arrived in front of him and the blood on the ground had flowed into a river, he took a deep breath and straightened his back, converting all the strength he accumulated in this life to support his body, staring at Gu Yun casually walking towards him with both hands behind his back.

Jing Xu said: "I used to hear people say that Marshal Gu's elegance is unparalleled. I did not expect that you were well-versed even in torture methods for interrogation, truly is the more talents, the better.”

"There is no need for flattery," Gu Yun said with an amused

smile. “The main activity in wars is to slay people. I did not lock you in a dark room, did not place you on a nail bed, neither did I ask you to sit on a tiger chair. The words 'torture to interrogate’ — I do not dare to accept. If you have nothing to say, you can go accompany them as well.”

Jing Xu’s eyelids twitched violently: “There are a total of sixty-four entrances and exits here. They have confessed it all at once. The first worthless few had already started to blabber. Pardon my imprudence, I do not understand Marshal Gu's intention?"

"Only for safety, no other intention," Gu Yun said with a smile. "In case there was a someone who had not confessed yet, you want to persuade me to stop killing? There is a large number of you, rest assured, I can't afford to slay you all."

Jing Xu: "..."

Gu Yun: "Since they had looked up to you as their leader, presumably, there must be other things you know about, why don't you talk about matters that I haven't heard of?"

Jing Xu clenched his teeth, remembering Fu Zhi Cheng, the chief culprit of all this, wishing nothing more than to skin him. He spoke through clenched jaws: “If I say that Fu Zhi Cheng was smuggling *Ziliujin* to rebel, would Marshal be interested in hearing?”

The cold smile on Gu Yun’s face gradually disappeared: “If I did not know this, how could I have guessed that you will be as courageous as to run to the southwest storage to deliver food? I will give you another chance, talk of something I don’t know.”

The Black Iron's Wind Slasher stood directly next to Jing Xu's ear. Even with the slightest of movement, he could feel the cold metal’s inhumanity. He also knew that only the slightest bit of steam was needed, and the blade would cut his head like cutting vegetables. That Gu Yun was cold and ruthless, continuing to be stubborn would result in his head falling to the ground much like the other lackeys, covered in dust, not a single difference.

Jing Xu finally bowed: "What do you want to know?"

Gu Yun waved his hand, the Wind Slasher's blade moved a few inches away from Jing Xu: "I want to know who had served as a connection for you after the *Ziliujin* was transported from the Southern Sea to inland Great Liang. Who had told you to privately stock *Ziliujin* and to hoard weaponry? Who had come up with this scheme, let you use those kites to confuse me, to take this opportunity to occupy the southwestern storage?”

Jing Xu tightly clenched his teeth.

"If I were you, I would not give up my life to protect that person," Gu Yun suddenly stepped forward and lowered his voice. "Look at the secret passages with sixty-four exits behind you. You bandits with nothing to do could drill in there anytime you wish, even gods could not overturn this land to dig you out...

“Who had encouraged you to gather the major forces of the three mountains together, for us to eliminate you all at once, huh?"

Gu Yun was a master of reversing up and down, black and white. He had perfected three skills in this life: excelling in literary arts, outstanding in battles, and amazing at deception. Illogical things could become immensely real coming from his mouth. What's more, when thinking about it carefully, there was nothing illogical about what he had just said, causing Jing Xu to break out in cold sweat.

Gu Yun’s side took more time in interrogating the bandits than it took Chang Geng to find his companions. It wasn't long before Chang Geng came back, but before he could come up to the hill, he was already stopped by the soldiers of the Black Iron Camp. The young soldier earnestly repeated exactly what he had been instructed to say: "Your Royal Highness, Marshal had told you to rest here for a while first."

Chang Geng did not seem to be surprised. He did not ask

anything further either, obediently waiting in the same place.

In these years, although Chang Geng wasn't able to see Gu Yun with his own eyes, he had studied every single battle Gu Yun had ever fought in with old General Zhong, studied the changes in his stand in politics starting from when he inherited the title of a Marquis from the past dynasty to the present, and even his handwriting — if Chang Geng were to go to Gu Yun's study now and take out any old notes, he could generally tell at what age Gu Yun had written it.

This helped him understand Gu Yun far more than being near him, listening to him boosting himself up as a ‘Northwest flower’ all day.

Seeing the hesitance in Gu Yun eyes as it swept over, Chang Geng was able to tell that he intended to interrogate by force, and more than that, he did not want Chang Geng to witness it. Even until today, Gu Yun still instinctively wanted to preserve his ever so fragile image of a kind father in front of Chang Geng.

Chang Geng did not have any objection regarding this, he instead would greatly cherish this little bit of love that yifu did not speak aloud.

Chang Geng was followed by two people, they were Ge Ban Xiao and Cao Niangzi who had come with him from Yanhui town to the capital — now called Ge Chen and Cao Chun Hua.

Ge Chen was a lovable chubby boy in his childhood. Now that he had grown up, his plump body was replaced with a tall and strong appearance. If one were to look at him from the neck down, he could be classified as a ‘muscular man’.

But unfortunately, from the neck up, the head seemed to have been placed there by mistake — on it was a face both tender and white, two soft baby fat on his cheeks, much like tofu, wrapped around his small nose, small mouth and small eyes. There was not a single detail that did not give off innocence and harmlessness.

Cao Chun Hua’s change was a lot more drastic. No matter what

he thought in his heart, he couldn’t help his body from growing into the frame of an adult man. It was to hard retain the same kind neutrality in appearance in his youth. He had no choice but to admit that he was really a ‘rotten man’, and changed back to men's clothing. Even so, he was still hesitant to let go and chose the name 'Cao Chun Hua' — except for himself, no one could tell how 'Chun Hua' is different than 'Niangzi'.

**Chun Hua meant spring flowers*
and Niangzi meant lady.

“How come we cannot move past yet?” Cao Chun Hua asked, stretching his neck. “I haven’t seen my Marquis for several years, I’ve been unable to sleep these few days.”

Chang Geng gloomily glanced at him, silently giving Cao Chun Hua another tick. Wait until he gathered words such as 'my family’s Marquis' for the total of fifty times from this person's mouth, then he’d give him a beating.

Cao Chun Hua still wasn't aware of this, he asked again: "Big brother, this time returning to the capital, will you inherit your royal status? I heard that the former Emperor had prepared for you the *Yanbei Wang* manor, then will you move out in the future or will you still be living in the Marquis' manor?”

Chang Geng was startled for a moment, then smiled bitterly: "That would depend on whether the Marquis would still want me here or not.”

Looking back now, Chang Geng could not imagine how he managed to gather the courage that year to leave the manor, to leave Gu Yun.

Not meeting him was alright, but this time as he had encountered Gu Yun in Sichuan, he felt as if he had to directly come face to face with his fated destiny. Even if beaten to death, it would still be difficult to accumulate the determination he mustered up that year.

Chen Qing Xu had told him to *'stay calm, do not let your thoughts run astray'*, of course, this has a role in restraining the Bone of Impurity from acting up. But human emotions, anger or joy, sorrow or happiness were all attached with one another. With the restraint of resentment and anger, joy would also then naturally fade away as time passed.

One would become like a sunless grass — although it could stay alive, its colors had all faded.

Chang Geng thought that he was about to become a Buddha.

Up until he met with Gu Yun again.

Not mentioning the exhaustion of traveling together with Gu Yun, all day if they were not dealing with rebels, it was fighting the bandits. Yet Chang Geng's heart was always filled with unreasonable happiness, eager and expectant – as if when he opened his eyes in the morning, he could already know something good will happen.

Although he knew that nothing good would happen, the Bone of Impurity still came to visit him every night.

If he inherited his title, would Gu Yun still let him stay?

Rationally thinking, Gu Yun would definitely allow him to stay, the Manor would at least be willing to keep him until he officially got married. If he stayed single, perhaps he could continue to be here forever.

This idea was too good, Chang Geng had to gather the strength of nine cattle and two tigers to restrain a dumb smile from forming on his face.

They waited for about half an hour until Gu Yun came out.

The mountain's secret passages resembled a huge spider web, extending in all directions, all sides were connected. Gu Yun had cut down more than forty heads in total, excluding some nonsense from the few who were scared to tears, and finally found the entrance for the sixty-four secret passages.

Ge Chen was shocked after hearing this: "What? Us two brothers had stayed in this mountain pretending to be mountain dwellers for more than half a year, only to find more than thirty entrances, how could the Marquis manage to discover more than sixty as soon as he arrived!"

"If you didn't get to the bottom of if, I would not be able to intercept them, let alone interrogate." Gu Yun looked at Ge Chen, trying to hold back for a moment, then in the end, he wasn't able to control himself, waving his hand: "Come here."

Ge Chen thought that Marshal had something of importance to instruct, eagerly coming closer. Unexpectedly, Gu Yun reached out to pinch his cheek.

Gu Yu had wanted to do this for a long time, his bad habit of having itchy hands had soon become a terminal illness. Whenever there was something to be felt with his hand, he could not help but want to pinch it.

"It's so fun." Gu Yun pinched for a while, thinking while still feeling unsatisfied: "*How could this be possible?"*

Ge Chen: "..."

Cao Chun Hua’s tiger eyes were full of affections and envy. He whispered, “The Marquis’s treatment is unfair, why don’t you pinch my face?”

He did not dare to say this in front of Gu Yun, thus only Chang Geng was able to hear him. Chang Geng thought, *"Okay, forty-eight times."*

Cao Chun Hua inexplicably felt a chill. He looked around for a moment, suddenly feeling an ominous foreboding in his heart.

Gu Yun followed Jing Xu's confession to create a drawing of this area. Then he ordered people to smoke along the secret entrance and exit, smoking for three days, making the large mountain into a chimney. Bats, mouses, poisonous insects no matter big or small, fled out of with their families altogether, yet in the end, the person whom Gu Yun wanted to capture was still nowhere to be seen.

Several soldiers volunteered to string up the rope and drill into the secret passage to explore. They had searched from sunrise to midnight inside sixty-four entrances and exits, but was not able to find even a single hair, only the set of table that Jing Xu mentioned.

On the fourth day, an underling came to report, after checking on Kuai Lan Tu's side, they did indeed discover a suspicious person — it was a guest whom Kuai Lan Tu kept in his house, named Wang Bu Fan, a name that instantly sounded like an alias.

**Bu Fan means 'out of ordinary'*

This guest normally did not go outside to see other people, but a few confidants of Kuai Lan Tu all knew he was very trusting of and highly respected this man, he had dedicated to him a private courtyard in his manor, ordering trusted servants and beautiful maids to accompany him.

Gu Yun: "Where is this 'Bu Fan' now?"

The underling replied: "Already ran away, the servants were poisoned to death without anyone knowing. When the people in the manor discovered this, the bones had already turned cold."

"Marshal," at this time, another Cavalry came over and said, "We went to check out the few locations for hiding the transported *Ziliujin* according to Jing Xu's confession, but it was completely empty, not leaving behind even a piece of paper."

Gu Yun silently turned the old Buddhist beads in his hand. The

mysterious guest next to Kuai Lan Tu, the ‘Master Ja’ in Jing Xu's story... everything seemed to be accidental at a glance, but Gu Yun could feel with an unexplainable instinct, that this matter involved an extremely large conspiracy.

These people had been secretly stirring up the Southern Frontier. They arrived unknowingly, then disappeared without any traces. Their identity became a mystery, their purpose was also a mystery.

They seemingly appeared to be enemies, yet at the same time, seemingly assisted him in exterminating these bandits.

Gu Yun could not figure out, in the end, was it him who messed up their scheme or did he walk head first into it?

The person whom Gu Yun had overturned the land in search of was currently boarding an ordinary small cargo ship on the surface of the Southern Sea.

Master Ja has already changed back to the complicated Western clothing, bowing down to look at a map. The vast expanse of Great Liang was on this small leather drawing. He was holding a pen, painting a small red circle on the Southern Frontier.

Together with that circle, there were already three other red circles on the old map, the other two are of the Northern Frontier and the Eastern Sea.

'Master Ja"s pen tip hesitated for a while on the map, then finally landed at the entrance to the Silk Road in the west.

"As of today, our trap had been perfectly laid out." Master Ja smiled. "Only a lead is needed, as soon as it is ignited, it would then explode with a bang—"

Wang Bu Fan, whose appearance resembled the Central Plains people, continued his words: "Engulfing Central Plains in a sea of flame."

The two looked at each other and smiled. They each raised their cups, clinking them together.

With such a large scale situation happening in the Southern Frontier, the Emperor in the palace was of course greatly angered, urging Gu Yun to quickly escort the bandit leaders and the traitorous general back to the capital.

Gu Yun had to temporarily put down his doubts and set out to the north.

But remembering that this time, his treasured son was willing to go back with him, the manor would be lively once again, he could somewhat feel eager about this returning trip to the capital.

"He had become a lot more adorable after growing up," 'Old man' Gu Yun felt greatly comforted, secretly praising to Shen Yi. "It's just that he suddenly became so sensible, I am still not quite used to it."

"Despicable." Shen Yi commented in a simple and concise manner, then as a result, eating one whip lash as he wished.

Shen Yi asked: "Right, after capturing Fu Zhi Cheng, what are you planning to do?"

Gu Yun stopped joking around, he was silent for a moment, then spoke with all seriousness: "Ji Ping, the truth is, I have always thought about all these years, you follow me like this, is it a waste of talent?"

Shen Yi gave him a silent look.

Gu Yun: "You are vastly knowledgeable. Your literary skills can enter Han Lin, your martial arts can bring peace to a territory, hiding away in Ling Shu Institute and the Black Iron Camp for so many years, it is time for you to show yourself..."

Although he had already heard Chang Geng analyze it, but listening to Gu Yun saying so, Shen Yi could not avoid feeling touched inside.

The two men were both comrades and friends. Although they shared a tight knit relationship, through both life and death, trusting enough to even leave their wife and child in the hands of the other if something were to happen, but Gu Yun's dog mouth could not spit out ivory, he had never expressed his appreciation directly towards him before.

Shen Yi could feel his eyes sting: “Zi Xi, you truly don’t have to...”

"Furthermore, I am also very sorry," Gu Yun added with earnest. "You see, such a beautiful man born from the heaven, raised by parents like myself, always staying near and blocking your peach blossoms, causing you to stay single for all these years. It’s really...*tch*, it’s all my fault.”

Shen Yi: "..."

This 'beautiful man born from the heaven, raised by parents' marked the end for the maximum of two sensible sentences a day, about to head straight for nonsensical content. Shen Yi was forced to withdraw a mouthful of all the things he wanted to say stuck in his throat, snorting, then ushered his horse and ran away.

Chang Geng saw this from not far away, quickly taking the opportunity to run over, occupying the position of Shen Yi, walking along side with Gu Yun: "How did General Shen run away again?"

Gu Yun smiled, rubbing his nose.

Chang Geng saw that there was a leaf on his Light Armor, he reached out to brush it off for him, then carefully said: "Yifu, even

lighter armors weigh at least forty pounds, let's remove it to relieve your body?"

Gu Yun did not oppose, letting Chang Geng reach out to help dismantle the Light Armor one by one. They were too close, the two horses had somehow taken a liking to one another and started to get intimate.

Gu Yun used one hand to push his horse's head away and scolded: "Don't be improper."

The armor on his arm was unloaded by a half. With this one movement, it almost flew out from his wrist, even dragging with it something else inside his sleeve.

Chang Geng was quick to react and caught it in time. He discovered that it was actually a bamboo flute made with very simple and coarse craftsmanship.

Chapter 46: Drunken

T/N: bonus comic uvu

—

Who knows that I'm rushing through frost and snow,
who will drown with me in this liquor

—

At first, neither of them reacted.

Chang Geng thought: *"Why is he carrying this broken flute on his body?"*

Gu Yun was still puzzled: "What just flew out?"

The eyes of the two men then fell onto the bamboo flute that had been weather-beaten, cracking at the tail.

After a second, Chang Geng suddenly felt that the flute appeared quite familiar. Gu Yun seemed to have been struck by lightning, he remembered it now - this object's origin was unjust!

The two of them almost acted at the same time - Gu Yun moved to grab it, Chang Geng instinctively tightened his palm, both hands holding the bamboo flute were deadlocked in the air.

Chang Geng asked innocently: "Can't I take a look?"

Gu Yun: "What's so good to look at?"

Gu Yun pulled the small bamboo flute from Chang Geng's hand by force, hurriedly returning it into his sleeve.

Chang Geng rarely was able to see his guilty conscience, he couldn't help but remember the little girl who sobbed her heart out in Yao's family four years ago. He could vaguely begin to understand, yet at the same time, he did not dare to believe it, asking in a roundabout way, "Is it a gift by someone else?"

Gu Yun lied, his face did not blush, his breathing did not stagger: "Made it myself."

"Oh," Chang Geng blinked. After a while, he intentionally and unintentionally said: "Lou Lan in the Western Regions also have bamboo?"

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng gently blinked, making his eyes seemingly sparkle, he then smiled: "Yifu's craftsmanship is too rough, let me make you a better one another day?"

Gu Yun was speechless, embarrassed to death. He had the feeling that kid had already seen through it and was deliberately mocking him. But stealing the flute was an incredibly shameful thing, he could not afford to be angry. He had to put away the heroic rabbit's tail and ran away.

Chang Geng did not chase after him. He stayed in the same place, pondering about this matter. He could not help but feel quite amused, recollecting the chain of events from the beginning to the end of Gu Yun sneaking into the courtyard of a child early in the morning to steal a flute. In an instant, a large brocade of flowers bloomed in his heart, blooming in full force for half a day, up until the sun fell over the west, it would then slowly come to a stop.

Its lingering fragrance in his heart pushed the Bone of Impurity into a small corner. When the flower fell into a stream and turned the water red, it gave birth to a thought, much like a seed, growing into thousands of branches.

Chang Geng thought: "*Why did he keep that?*"

Keeping it with him at all time, would he take it out to look at occasionally?

When he looked at it, did he think of me?

Would this mean that Gu Yun's feelings towards him... was deeper than what he had always imagined?

Could he be greedy for more and get closer to yifu?

The scent of Miss Chen's tranquilizer spread out from the satchel. Chang Geng stared at the back of Gu Yun, the words 'going with the flow' echoing back and forth in his mind was about to burn him away. He did not dare to dwell on it too much, but harboring this small speculation in anxiety, he could not avoid the itchy, uncomfortable sensation inside, burning his soul, eating away at his bone.

The trip of escorting the criminals should have been long and tasteless, but unfortunately, there was no telling if it was the Black Iron Camp that moved fast, or it was Chang Geng's heart that was slow. Before the cold winter arrived, they have already returned to the capital.

At this time, the treacherous case of rebellion in the Southern Frontier had violently exploded in the depths of the Imperial Capital.

Sun Jiao returned to the capital in a state of being half-dead, half-alive. Due to fright, he had fallen ill and became bedridden in the blink of an eye. Even Emperor Long An himself did not expect it. He had only used this small plan to carry out the Drumming Order, yet that Southwest commander actually dared to rebel. He was both fearful and furious, ordering further investigation.

Due to the wide involvement of the case, Da Li Temple's Ministry of Criminal Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and even the Inspectorate, from large to small, were equally in a state of fear. Even Gu Yun who rarely had the opportunity to return to the capital to rest could not have a moment of peace, constantly being summoned into the court for questioning.

The southwest admiral Fu Zhi Cheng colluded with the mountain bandits, killed the court officials, smuggled *Ziliujin*, and attempted to rebel against the case. The bandit leaders and the head of the rebel party were sentenced to death, involving their families along with it.

But the iron-blooded Long An Emperor still refused to give up, and the situation quickly became impossible to turn back form, resembling a radish that was pulled up from the ground, bringing

with it dirt and soil. This matter had implicated the six central powers. Those who had a personal relationship with Fu Zhi Cheng, those who had received bribes and opened the back door for him, even the old minister who had recommended Fu Zhi Cheng in the past, none were able to run, all were involved in it.

Some were imprisoned, some were dismissed from positions, and for a moment, those in the imperial court were in a state of anxiety, the entire capital was engulfed in silent suspicion.

The sky had remained clouded until the end of the year, heavy snow finally came down.

This year, when they bid farewell to the old and welcomed the new, The Marquis of Order returned the Black Tiger Emblem, the implementation of the Drumming Order was for certain. The Ministry of War promptly sent specialized personnel to all factions to be inspectors.

At this point, Emperor Long An had gathered military power to the extreme, even Emperor Wu during His time could not compare.

Throughout the year, the only thing that could make Li Feng feel at ease was perhaps Gu Yun's understanding of the situation.

As Chang Geng had predicted, The Emperor's wish was respected, as a matter of course, he would in turn honor Gu Yun, raising Shen Yi's status by two ranks, appointing him as the Southwest Commander, and at the same time, bestowed upon the Fourth Prince Li Min the title of *Yan Bei Wang*.

On the 16th of the first month, in the name of honoring the Marquis of Order's birthday, Old master Shen had sent over two carts filled with gifts blocking the entrance.

Old master Shen had already retired for a long time, they only have one Shen Yi - the kid who did not seek advancement. Shen Yi had shown signs of being a freak at a young age. Literary and martial arts, he was excellent at both, yet at the same time, he was obsessed with neither. He instead would hide away in the courtyard all day, messing with Machines.

In the Shen Family, from the house guard iron puppets, down to the steam lamp hanging in the room, there was not a single object that had not been dismantled by him.

Although Old Master Shen believed in Lao Zhuang*, paid attention to 'everything had its own will', it must be that his practice was not thorough enough. He still harbored some expectations for this son.

**refers to the founders of Daoism, Laozi and Zhuangzi*

Gu Yun was summoned into the palace early in the morning and had already left. Although he was not in the capital all year round, being of high status, he still received many gifts. The manor had no mistress, the annual gifts for the holiday occasions were being taken care of by the old butler alone. Hearing that these were the gifts from Shen Yi's father, Chang Geng had especially followed the old butler, curiously taking a look.

Old man Shen was also an oddball himself. Loved to play in his young age, continued to play in his middle age, and now that he had grown tired from playing in his later years, he began to seek enlightenment and immortality and did not pay attention to the common world. He naturally favored concocting pills of immortality and brewing wine.

In the presents he sent for Gu Yun, gold and silver jewels, silk satin, antique treasures... - there were none of it, but instead, he gifted directly two carts of wine, all brewed by himself.

Chang Geng did not know whether to laugh or cry. As soon as he looked up, he could see the freshly-baked Southwest Commander rushing over on his horse.

Old master Shen had made these arrangements by himself, by the time Shen Yi found out and chased after the cart, it was already too late. Shen Yi looked at the wine cart at the entrance of the manor, burying his face in the neck of his horse: "How shameful!"

When Gu Yun returned later in the evening, he could see the servants unloading the wine from the cart, a pale-faced Shen Yi stood

on the side.

No one knew what the Emperor had said to him. Gu Yun's expression appeared indifferent - he would always become happy as soon as he returned to the manor. He did not laugh when he entered the door, not cracking jokes with the guards at the gate, he must be truly frustrated this time.

Gu Yun: "How come you are here?"

Shen Yi lifted his chin towards the heart-wrenching wine cart: "Our old man brought you a bribe, as thanks to you for bringing me to promotion."

Gu Yun step forward to pick up one jug, breaking the mud seal directly, sniffing it, then took a sip on the spot.

"What you're craving for is what you get, did your old man brew this himself? I could instantly tell by just taking a sip," Gu Yun exclaimed, "That's right, you already came, don't leave. Even before this first month ends, the both of us already have go separate ways, at that time, each of us one at the North, one at the South, who knew how many months and years it would be before we meet again. Have a few drinks with me today."

Shen Yi had also had this intention, wholeheartedly agreeing to it.

Gu Yun also asked: "Where is Chang Geng?"

"Kitchen."

Gu Yu's footsteps came to a stop: "What?"

"He has insisted on cooking a bowl of noodles for you personally," Shen Yi laughed. "Uncle Wang tried to stop him for a long while but couldn't."

"Our *Jun Wang* is truly very talented. Could stabilize the situation in the face of the enemies, could perform acupuncture after a battle, sewing pouches in his spare time, even walking on the treacherous battleground of the kitchen as if it was only a flat

surface...

"If he was a lady, even the entire Black Iron Camp being here could not hold back the people coming to block your door asking for his hand in marriage."

Gu Yun frowned: "A gentleman stays far from the kitchen, this is absurd."

Shen Yi saw that his expression was off, asking: "What's the matter, what did His Majesty call you into the palace for?"

Gu Yun was silent for a moment, then lowered his voice: "The Emperor wants to dispose of Master Feng Han."

Shen Yi was taken aback: "What!"

Master Feng Han, with surname Zhang, named Feng Han, had been the head of Ling Shu Institute for 18 years. When Shen Yi was still at the institute, he used to work under Master Feng Han. The man had now reached the age of sixty, dedicating his entire lifetime to Ling Shu Institute, he had never gotten married; wife, children, grandchildren, he did not have any, neither was he interested in same-sex relationships.

It was said that the servants pouring tea in his house are all made of iron. For living beings, in addition to himself, there was only one old dog that was about to pass away - of course, this was only a rumor, not mentioning other people, even Shen Yi had never been there.

The old master was an unusual character and did not like visiting guests at his home. He had dedicated his whole life to armors and machines, aside from when Gu Yun was rebuilding the Black Iron Camp where he had stood up to clearly express his opinion.

At other times, not mentioning political matters in the court, he was too lazy to even pay any mind to humans. Someone who was this indifferent towards the world, for what reason could he angered the emperor?

Shen Yi: "Why?"

Gu Yun: "The old man had brought forth his request yesterday, opposing the 'Zhang Ling law' causing His Majesty to become furious."

Shen Yi: "Has he ever not opposed to it? From the day the law was implemented, he had never been silent. I heard my old colleague say that he brought forth a new request every three days, he did not stop even in the face of wind and rain. The Emperor had never paid attention to him. How come he suddenly..."

The Zhang Ling Law was the decree that restricted the mechanics of the common folk. When it first came out, it had caused a lot of controversies, but later on, was sank down by the large waves arising from the Drumming Order.

"Master Feng Han's personality... you did not see what he had written in his request, saying that what the Zhang Ling law restricted was not the mechanics, but the wisdom of the people. In the long run, if this law continued to be in effect, this country will not be the same, letting us sit here and wait for the day when the foreigners riding on the cloud come knocking at the door of Great Liang's frontier. The only thing missing was for him to point directly at the nose of the Emperor and call him a danger to the country."

"In fact, His Majesty usually wasn't particular with him. But due to the case of the Southern Sea, His Majesty's heart was in a knot, wasn't able to untie in just one winter, and the old man's action was equal to jumping directly into a muzzle."

When Gu Yun got to this part, he paused and shook his head: "Today, His Majesty even stopped me and said, *'I have asked myself, since my ascension, I have always been diligent and cautious, why is it that the nation had never had a peaceful day?* '- what else could I say? "

Emperor Long An had only been enthroned for few short years. First, it was his blood connected brother's collusion with Dong Ying people to rebel. Then, it was the high ranking official at the frontier colluding with the bandits to rebel. Each event seemed to bear with it immense mockery. The *Ziliujin* black market that had been repeatedly banned but could not be stopped had become a disease in his heart.

Shen Yi didn't say anything, the two walked side by side to the inner courtyard. They both knew, although Master Feng Han's action was trying to find death, what he had spoken of were not unreasonable.

Later as the common folk mechanics were restricted, from then on, everything will be relying on Ling Shu Institute. How many new technologies could be produced in a year? What's more, Ling Shu Institute will forever put military armors as their utmost priority, would there be any room left for the development of technologies for civilians in the future?

Shen Yi: "Is there any way to save him?"

Gu Yun looked up at the other end of the capital, engulfing in the light of the setting sun, breathing out white smoke: "I don't know, I will try my best."

Shen Yi nodded. After a while, he suddenly said: "Marshal, I grew up here in the capital, but sometimes I feel that I could not breathe."

Gu Yun handed over the jug of wine without a word.

Shen Yi chugged down his own family home-brew wine, the strong liquor rushed up. He reached out and patted Gu Yun's back: "They are all preparing for your birthday celebration, don't wear a blank expression out in there later."

Two people then stood on the curving hallway, each taking turn, sip by sip, finishing the entire wine jug.

Wine could solve worry, could warm the blood, could add beauty, could make people put aside any large ordeals behind, and temporarily relax.

However, as soon as he entered the room, Gu Yun was still shocked.

Many broken puppets in the manor had all been taken out by Ge Chen. No one knew how long it took for him to repair them all, a group of large iron faces was moving normally and swiftly back and

forth.

Another group of puppets had been unloaded of armor and weapons, lined up in a row, each hand holding a satin fan, dancing in the yard - Cao Niangzi was the only human of flesh and blood, dressed in brightly colored clothing, leading the dance.

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi shook his head and praise: "Truly a genius."

Gu Yun: "...Huh?"

Shen Yi put his hand around Gu Yun shoulder: "Ge Chen that kid, truly is a genius. Whenever I remember that the first Light and Heavy Armors that this genius handled were given by me, I am simply... I could only wish to kidnap him and bring him with me to the Southern Frontier."

Gu Yun: "..."

He always felt that these words of General Shen were somewhat strange.

Chang Geng really did cook for Gu Yun a bowl of noodles. Last time he only dropped an egg, even mixing eggshells into it. This time that Chang Geng came back, returning to the kitchen once more, his skill truly could not be compared to before.

It was incredibly well done, Gu Yun no longer mentioned such thing as 'a gentleman stays far from the kitchen' in front of him, almost eating even the bowl.

With three bowls of wine in the stomach, the people in the courtyard began to fire up.

Shen Yi sighed: "So many years from the capital to the Western Regions, to the Northern Territory, then to Lou Lan, you have always been there, suddenly you will no longer be around in the future, I could not help but feel quite sad."

Gu Yun: "Less nonsense, drink more."

Ge Chen ran over and sincerely said: "General Shen, I have some friends from the pugilist world in the southwest. If you have any inconveniences in the future, you can let them do it for you!"

Shen Yi looked at him with teary eyes: "Friends in the pugilist world are not necessary. Could you give me one of your wooden birds?"

The two tightly held hands, looking at each other with tear-filled eyes, lamenting for they have met too late, and ran to the side, began to talk about 'how to extend the life of the machines', Gu Yun had to fine each of them three bowls of wine.

Ge Chen was almost tumbling down to the bottom of the table after three bowls, Cao Chun Hua acted crazily, rolling into a ball with the puppets in the yard. Chang Geng had to continuously take care of this, pay attention to that.

Afterwards, everyone truly did have too much.

Shen Yi grabbed Gu Yun's arm, his tongue in a twist, repeating over and over: "Zi Xi... Zi Xi ah, your family is in the eye of the storm,... always in the eye of the storm, you have to be... be careful ....."

Gu Yun was leaning on the jars of wine, not bothering to move or talk.

He only laughed, his laughter was unable to stop until tears came down. He smiled and thought: *"I am the only one left in Gu Family."*

Shen Yi staggered and stood up, walked for two steps then fell onto the ground, his mouth did not stop: "The Emperor... the Emperor is afraid of you."

There was no telling who the Emperor was afraid of, but Chang Geng was already quite afraid of them, quickly calling for the family guards to help Shen Yi up: "Hurry and carry General Shen away."

Gu Yun leaned on the table, revealing an unfathomable smile. If it wasn't for his scattered gaze, he would appear very much like a

sober person.

Shen Yi was lifted up by the guards, but still refused to behave, he struggled while saying: "You... Gu Zi Xi, in your heart... you have let go... but the Emperor... the Emperor was unable to let go, he will always be afraid of you, as afraid as the former Emperor.

"How could they not? They have destroyed you like this, yet you did not die, the Black Iron Camp still remained...even continuing to be this powerful.

"Those people thought, if the positions were to reverse, how would they take their revenge? Using themselves to measure others, Zi Xi... everyone in the world will use themselves to measure others..."

Chang Geng had an average tolerance for alcohol, he had been made to drink a lot by Gu Yun, he could only barely remain sensible. Unexpectedly, hearing these words from Shen Yi, he immediately sobered up.

What did they mean by 'destroyed you like this'?

He was unsure if whether these were only the gibberish of a drunkard, he couldn't help but step forward, wanting to listen more clearly.

Who knew that after a moment of shouting, Shen Yi turned around, holding onto the house post and threw up, vomiting himself into a mass of mud, then fell down and directly fainted.

Chang Geng had no choice but to let the still awake people carry out the courtyard full of drunkards.

In the end, only a few puppets remained dancing loyally, white steam spurting out from their heads.

The joy and laughter of the capital gradually disappeared.

Gu Yun leaned half of his body on the table, of course, he could no longer tell the directions, mumbling: "How great, all got carried out."

Still had the face to mock other people - Chang Geng let out a long sigh, lowering his voice and coaxed: "You are the greatest, let's go back, I will carry you, okay?"

Gu Yun looked up at him, his eyes were too dark and too deep, the alcohol Chang Geng had suppressed down had arisen once again by his gaze.

"A Yan..." Gu Yun suddenly whispered.

Chang Geng frowned.

"A Yan," Gu Yun laughed, seemingly helpless, mixed with a hint of bitterness, lacking the will to live unlike usual: "I will tell you a secret, don't tell the others... your father... he truly is a bastard. "

Chang Geng: "..."

Just a load of nonsense!

Gu Yun laughed in a low voice, mumbling: "Who knows that I'm rushing through frost and snow, who will drown with me in this liquor..."

Chang Geng did not intend to play a staring contest with this drunken cat. He reached out and helped Gu Yun, dragging the man into the bedroom. Unexpectedly, a drunken Gu Yun was very clingy, groping at him like a lecher. Chang Geng was incredibly on edge being clung onto, wanting to throw him directly on the bed, but as he looked down at Marshal Gu's hard bed board being covered by only a thin layer of mattress, he did not have the heart to do so.

Unexpectedly, Gu Yun touched the vein on his elbows, and with this action, Chang Geng's arm lost its strength, almost letting Gu Yun fall off. He was about to reach out to catch him, but forgot that he himself was also currently off-balance, being dragged down by Gu Yun in a split second.

Gu Yun let out a breath at the impact of his body, gasping for a long time, then patted Chang Geng's back and spilling nonsense: "Oh baby, you are crushing me to death."

Chang Geng laid on him, the seed buried in his heart silently blooming in the deep darkness.

He stared closely at Gu Yun's pale chin and suddenly whispered, "Who are you calling?"

Gu Yun was silent.

Chang Geng felt that he was perhaps also drunk, otherwise, how could he have this much courage?

He suddenly pressed on, holding Gu Yun's chin with his fingers: "Yifu, who are you calling?"

The word 'yifu' seemed to have reminded Gu Yun of something, he dazedly called out, "Chang Geng".

These two words were like a blunt piece of iron, scraping across Chang Geng's ear. The inside of his head exploded, the words *'go with the flow'* transformed into a hand, pushing at his back.

As if being possessed, he leaned down and kissed Gu Yun.

……
长庚

义父…

Gu Yun was startled at first, then slowly started to respond. He grabbed Chang Geng's collar and pushed him down from himself.

Chang Geng: "..."

His back hit the stone-hard bed board of Gu Yun, suddenly sobering up again, the blood on his face all vanished. He was in a complete panic, thinking to himself: *"What am I doing?"*

Gu Yun looked down at him from above. Chang Geng wanted to open his mouth and call 'yifu', but found that he was unable to speak.

Unexpectedly, Gu Yun suddenly smiled, this drunkard could no longer recognize anyone anymore. He reached out and caressed his face, hazily speaking in a nasal voice: "Be good."

Chang Geng: "..."

The next moment, Gu Yun hugged Chang Geng's stiff body, carefully kissing from his forehead down to his mouth, very gently licking open his lips, giving him a long and lingering torture. In the meanwhile, his hands did not stay still either, trying to pull off Chang Geng's clothes.

Chang Geng felt like he was about to blow up. One hand was clutching at Gu Yun's waist, trembling greatly, yet he did not dare to use force.

Gu Yun seemed to be able to sense his trembling. In bed, this person truly had the manners of a son of a prestigious family. He touched Chang Geng's belt, at the same time, revealing a drunken smile and gently said: "Don't be afraid, follow me, from now on, I will treat you well."

Chang Geng pressed his voice to the lowest, quietly asking: "Who am I?"

Gu Yun was puzzled as he heard his voice, starting to ponder in a daze. Unfortunately, his brain had stopped functioning. Not only was he unable to come to a conclusion, but he had also become entangled in Chang Geng's clothes, tossing around for a long time, and the more

he tried to untie them, the tighter it got. In the end, he worked himself to exhaustion, dropping to the side and directly fell asleep.

Chang Geng clenched his teeth in the silence of the night and used all his strength to count his long and trembling breath. Up until he reached fifty or sixty times, he finally mustered up enough strength to get up and push Gu Yun away.

He quickly pulled his clothes out of Gu Yun's hand, adjusted him into a proper position and hurriedly pulled the quilt up for him. Then, he could no longer wait for even a moment and instantly turned to flee.

—

art by Emi(_May_Rain_)
Please do not reupload or repost anywhere! ^^

Chapter 47: Muddy Water

—

Directly ran away from home!

—

Gu Yun slept until the sun was hanging high up in the sky.

Yesterday, he was quite frustrated. He had more or less intended to use liquor to disperse his sorrow, but in the end, he had become completely drunk, his flesh and bones had all stiffened, feeling even more exhausted after sleeping.

On the small table next to him, no one knew who had placed for him a bowl of hangover medicine. Gu Yun pinched his nose and downed it in one go, finally able to open his dry eyes. He sat on the bed for a while, quickly reflected on himself, in a state of half-asleep, half-awake, he suddenly became aware of his recent inexplicable anxiety.

“Is it that bad?” Gu Yun yawned and asked himself.

Thinking about it carefully, of course, it was not.

In recent years, the national treasury had been quite tight. Of course, military expense was also lacking, but it had not been so tight that people had to starve.

God had been quite at ease as well. A few floods, earthquakes, and a drought two or three years ago were not particularly serious. Central Plains was so big, whenever the Dragon King from who knew which cloud sneezed, the court must immediately work themselves to relieve the disasters. In the past few years since the beginning of the Long An regency, the wind and the waves could be considered as peaceful.

For the two cases in the southwest frontier and Jiangnan, although their effect was quite big, causing the Emperor to be fearful of the unknown, in fact, in the eyes of Gu Yun, they could only be

regarded as small ordeals.

For the Eastern Sea, Wei Wang was obviously still not ready, yet the leakage of *Ziliujin* had already revealed his plan. The situation in the Southern Frontier was a clash between multiple parties, and from the start, Fu Zhi Cheng had harbored no intention for rebellion. In short, it was not even as dangerous as when they were hunting for bandits in the desert sand.

Compared with that year, when the nation had no substantial military force, when he single-handedly carried Great Liang on his shoulder, fighting six countries of the Western Region joining forces altogether to rebel, this was nothing.

At that time, every single day, he did not know whether he could still see the sun tomorrow, there were no distractions in his heart. Now it was the opposite. He was of high power, sitting in his own courtyard, watching iron puppets dancing, even borrowing wine to rid himself of worries.

Afterward, he seemed to have done something extra…

What was it?

"Ah yes," Gu Yun pressed his own temple, thinking, *"Seems like I have teased a maid, even scared her away."*

"Too outrageous." Gu Yun muttered to himself while washing his face and changing clothes.

Halfway through, his action came to a halt — that's not right, the manor did not even have one female horse, where would they find a maid!

Gu Yun finally woke up completely, his face pale, he pondered for a while, then turned over the blanket — a small object rolled down the corner of the bed — it was the leather pouch Chang Geng always carried with him.

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi’s tolerance for alcohol was below average, he was even more drunk than Gu Yun. Early in the morning, before he could wake up, Gu Yun had already barged into the guest room, dragging him up.

"I have something to tell you." Gu Yun's expression was grim, as if he just caught sight of a ghost.

Shen Yi did not dare to neglect, a pile of entangling thoughts passing by his head: Fu Zhi Cheng escaped from prison? Master Feng Han had been deemed guilty by the emperor? The Northern barbarians invaded them? Or was it a rebellion in the Central Plains garrison?

Shen Yi resisted the discomfort he was currently feeling and concentrated his mind, waiting to hear what Gu Yun had to say.

As a result, that Gu hesitated for a long while, his gaze moved from the house post to his own toe, even a fart was not released.

Shen Yi asked with fear: "What happened?"

Gu Yun: "... forget it, I don't want to talk about it anymore."

Shen Yi was instantly furious, the hairs all over his body standing up three feet high. How did this type who didn't speak fully have not gotten slain yet!

"Hold on," Shen Yi rushed to grab Gu Yun, angrily asking, "What the hell is going on?"

Gu Yun at this time had followed the 'evidence' on his bed, slowly tracing back to the memory before he had gotten drunk, what he said and what he did, was all vivid in front of him — too embarrassing, too wretched, too despicable.

Gu Yun covered his face: *What have I done?*

He felt that his stomach acid was rising, painfully asking Shen

Yi: "Did I drink too much and acted out of line?"

"You don't usually become that drunk either?" Shen Yi held his quilt on the bedside — they stayed at the frontier all year round, although they also drank, they never dare to get too drunk, otherwise, it would be dangerous if they messed up once something were to happen.

"What's the matter," Shen Yi looked at Gu Yun's face, asking with great interest. "What humiliating deed did you do yesterday?"

Gu Yun reached out and pressed Shen Yi — one who liked to watch a bustling scene without concern that something big could develop — into the blanket, then swiftly walked away in a state of panic.

At the beginning, Gu Yun still hung on to a few bits of optimism, thinking to himself: *"Xiao Chang Geng will not pay particular attention to a drunkard will he? If it was me, I would not put it to heart."*

... I would at least used this opportunity to make fun of him for a year and a half.

However, this luck soon disappeared — for Gu Yun remembered that Chang Geng, whom he pressed onto his bed yesterday, had been continuously trembling. It seemed that not only did Chang Geng take it to heart, he was also infuriated.

Gu Yun squinted at Chang Geng's pouch with a dire expression, as if he was carrying a pack of gunpowder that could explode at any moment.

The faint scent of tranquilizer arose, soaking through his insides, Gu Yun sniffed it around while calculating: *"Should I pretend to be confused? Or should I pretend to be oblivious? Or perhaps I should act as if nothing had happened?"*

Before he could manage to come to a decision, the old butler was already coming over, Gu Yun asked him with the appearance of a truly righteous being: "Uncle Wang, where is His Royal Highness?"

The old butler replied: "I was about to tell the Marquis. His

Highness had left early to go to Hu Guo Temple."

Gu Yun: "..."

Directly ran away from home!

The old butler did not notice his expression and said: "That's right, yesterday, Master Jiang of Da Li Temple had sent a painting for your birthday occasion, there was a letter inside, does the Marquis wish to take a look?"

Gu Yun: "Let me see."

Although Shen Yi who had been following Gu Yun fighting here and there suddenly became a general, in truth, he was able to step into the rank of officials by passing the imperial examination. Da Li Temple's head officer Jiang Chong was once his senior from the same school. Through this relationship, Jiang Chong was able to get to know Gu Yun. Later, they have discovered that their personalities clicked with the other party and gradually became friends, but in order to avoid suspicion, the two did not frequently meet with each other.

Gu Yun swept through the letter quickly, suddenly no longer had the mind to be concerned about Chang Geng who was angry with him.

In addition to greetings, Jiang Chong had briefly revealed to him the news — the Emperor had made up his mind to completely destroy the root of *Ziliujin* black markets.

This sentence alone had many information contained in it.

In the evening, Qi Yuan tower was still filled with the lively sound of people. In a private room, Southwest commander Shen Yi serving as the head, invited his old friends in the capital and his old colleagues at Ling Shu Institute together for a feast. Shen Yi was about to move to the southwest to take office, and although it was a

remote location a long distance away, it was still a grand promotion, his old friends were already asking him to treat them.

After three rounds of drinking, the Marquis of Order personally arrived, but only stayed for a while, saying that something happened at home and excused himself early. Not long after he left, Jiang Chong, the current head officer of Da Li Temple also bid his farewell and left.

Jiang Chong did not take his carriage as he exited, sending all the servants away, saying that he wished to stroll for a while to sober up. He only took with him one young servant and chose a narrow path along the icy riverside under the tower.

As soon as he took a turn, there was already an old and rundown carriage waiting there for him. The curtains were lifted, revealing half of Gu Yun's face: "It's too cold, allow me to send brother Han Shi off."

Jiang Chong replied: "I have troubled you", understanding his intention, he then came inside the carriage.

Master Jiang was over forty years old, yet the remnants of time did not leave their mark on his face. Aside from his calm demeanor, it would not be an exaggeration to say that he was a young man.

On the carriage, he used Gu Yun's small stove to warm up his hands. Jiang Chong did not beat around the bush either, going straight for the main topic: "Yesterday, after the Marquis' departure from the palace, the Emperor had secretly summoned the three divisions. I could see that he may not only want to brought back the Rong Jin law, but also to carry out two things at once, using the aftermath of the rebellion in the Southern Frontier, starting from the southwest, they will be thoroughly examining the Ziliujin black market in this territory."

The so-called '*Rong Jin** Law' dated back to the era of Gu Yun's grandfather, Emperor Liang Wu. At that time, the sea route first opened, the private usage of *Ziliujin* was once difficult to contain. In order to strengthen the control, Emperor Wu issued four strict orders. It was what the later generations call the '*Rong Jin* Law'.

**melt gold*

However, with the increasing number of civilian machines and armors, the meltdown was slowly no longer applicable, and was abolished during the Yuan and Xiandi years.

Jiang Chong: "The Marquis will probably go back to the northwest at the beginning of spring. It is reasonable to say that even if the sky in the capital were to fall down it will not affect the Marquis, but if the Emperor wants to strictly check the *Ziliujin* black market I am afraid that the Marquis will stay in the frontier for a long time, it would still be hard to avoid having harmless actions being misconstrued, please be more careful..."

Jiang Chong could not directly point to Gu Yu's nose and said, "I know that your hand is not clean either. Recently, the black markets will be strictly investigated, you should cut off all ties with them and be quiet for a few days" - his point had come across quite clear.

Gu Yun understood, saying with appreciation, "Thank you for your advice."

When Jiang Chong's words have been realized, he stopped dwelling on it further and changed the subject: "When it comes to *Ziliujin*, you must face a group of wicked and cruel people. It's one thing to face those wicked bunch in the pugilist world. I'm afraid they all secretly have connections with the imperial court officials. Who to investigate? Who not to investigate? How to investigate? To tell the Marquis the truth, I am also currently at a loss for what to do."

"There would be no fish in too clear water, and I don't know if the Emperor of Long An wants bring peace to the country, or to stir it up."

Gu Yun understood his dilemma, trying to comfort him: "Brother Han Shi can rest assured , when this news comes out, as long as one was not too nearsighted, everyone would know how to hide themselves, there aren't any of us who are not as nervous as you.

"If there were any difficulties in the future, you can send me a

letter. Even though I no longer possess the Black Tiger Emblem, and the local troops no longer answer to me, but they would still provide assistance out of however little respect."

Jiang Chong smiled bitterly again: "Thank you. First, it was the Zhang Ling Law, now it was the Rong Jin Law... I rarely go out of the capital, there are many things I do not know. I just heard people say that in the early years, '*white mist dyed the street, no trace of people in sight*'. Everyone said that the grand scene of travelling long distances on 'Pegasus' in the future is long gone."

Gu Yun fiddled with the old wooden beads on his hand, he did not continue on but changed the subject: "How is Master Feng Han?"

"He is still imprisoned" Jiang Chong said. "Rest assured, I am already keeping watch - does the Marquis intend to request for him to be pardoned?"

Gu Yun smiled sadly and said: "Me? My request would only urge him to die faster. In fact, there is no need for that either, many of the objects in the palace came from the hands of Ling Shu Institute. As the Emperor sees them, he will remember his good point — Master Feng Han is passionate about machines and does not understand the world, the Emperor understands even this godforsaken trait of his, his anger will cool down after a few days' time."

This was easy to say, but how to avoid igniting the Emperor's flame while carefully mentioning how Master Feng Han only raised dogs in place of children, making the Emperor both amused and frustrated where he could no longer be angry, required many planning.

Jiang Chong glanced at Gu Yun and knew that he had probably made private preparations. He was raised in the palace, it was not unusual for him to have people to put to use, just that...

Jiang Chong whispered: "The Marquis returned from the northwest this time, your way of socializing had become wiser*."

**the words used here was actually a term in Buddhism, although it is similar to the word wise, the "wise" in this term is referring to the kind*

that came from complete selflessness, doing things while thinking only for others.

Gu Yun said in a meaningful way: "With tigers and wolves outside, I dare not not to give my all. The mountains and rivers are not yet at peace, I dare not underestimate this body. It is useless to fight for such meaningless anger."

The two exchanged messages in a couple of sentence, Jiang Chong then excused himself. Before taking his leave, he suddenly stood still, saying to Gu Yun: "Allow me to say one disrespectful line. In the past two years, the local annual reports are all about how successful the farming puppets are each harvest. In some place, there exists even a type of steam-powered machine that could weave and fabricate clothing, yet the national treasury is not full. There are even all kinds of laws that resemble iron chains. This lowly official truly have an illusion, it seems that after so many years, Great Liang has once returned to the era under Emperor Wu."

Gu Yun smiled and said: "To tell brother Han Shi the truth, for the past two years or so, I have also felt an unexplainable anxiety, but it does not make sense. Perhaps it is like this — people always wanted for things to be better everyday. Once there was a delay, even if it is temporarily, even those in high position, one could not help but feel lost and anxious?"

Jiang Chong's expression changed slightly, he seemed to want to say something, then decided against it.

Gu Yun asked: "What is it?"

Da Li's head officer whispered: "Us people who work in investigation, sometimes we would have an intuition — there is no reason and no basis, but in the end it is very likely to turn into reality. The more experienced one is, the more accurate their intuition will be. The Marquis ventured out to the battlefield, facing life and death situations, perhaps your instincts have predicted something… please be very careful."

Gu Yun was startled for a moment, he did not say more, the two people with their hearts filled with heavy concerns both took their leave.

When Gu Yun returned to the manor, it was already dark. When he asked the guards, they replied that Chang Geng had not returned yet. He only left a message saying that Master Liao Ran had returned to Hu Guo Temple, thus he planned to stay there for a few more days.

Gu Yun had no choice but to think: *"That is fine then, stay there until all the anger had cooled down then come back."*

Unexpectedly, no one knew if whether Chang Geng's flame was 'extraordinary large' or what, he had stayed there for four to five days in a row, seemingly intending to settle down in Hu Guo temple. Gu Yun did not have many days where he could stay in the capital, and with his departure this time, who knew how many years until they could meet again. He finally could not bear it longer and held his nose and went to Hu Guo Temple.

Liao Ran was still the same, all year round, only when returning to Hu Guo temple to meet with prestigious guests did he wash himself into a hibiscus of clear water. It was not easy for him to have some downtime that afternoon, playing a game of chess with Chang Geng in the Zen room, the two talked only through sign language, quiet and silent, but many words were exchanged.

Chang Geng: "I want to ask the master about one thing — what happened to my yifu's eyes and hearing?"

Liao Ran quickly signed: "It would not end well to talk behind others' back."

"I must know about this." Chang Geng spoke with a grave expression. "And I would definitely get to the bottom of it, if the master does not talk, I will go find someone else."

The monk fixed his eyes on him for a moment.

After a long time, Liao Ran very hesitantly used sign language to respond: "The monk was only able to catch a few rumors. When the Marquis was a child, he was taken to the Northern Frontier by the old Marquis and the first Princess. At that time, the war between Great Liang and the Barbarians had already subsided, logically, there should have been no danger.

"But unexpectedly, there was a group of barbarians who stubbornly resisted and forced their way into the garrison. The Marquis was injured by a stray arrow, which happened to be a poisonous arrow of the barbarians."

This statement coincidentally matched with Gu Yun's words.

Chang Geng asked: "What kind of poison?"

Liao Ran shook his head: "Your Highness was learning from Miss Chen, you are already aware that the poison of the barbarians rendered helpless even the Chen family. That poison is highly detrimental. The affected individual will be paralyzed and will die in a few days, but for children, the effect was much slower.

'That year, old master Chen had rushed from Shanxi to the Northern Frontier garrison, not resting for two days and one night, using Chen family's specialized acupuncture technique to save the life of the little Marquis, but afterwards, his eyesight and hearing were also severely damaged."

Chang Geng slightly frowned: "Northern Frontier..."

If this matter was done by the Northern Barbarians, what was the explanation for Shen Yi's phrase '*they destroyed you like this*'?

Was it only the nonsense of having too much to drink?

At this moment, a small abbot suddenly came in and reported: "Your Highness, Uncle Liao Ran, the Marquis of Order had arrived."

Chapter 48: Startled

Happy Chinese New Year!

—

Gu Yun's heart was suddenly startled — he had never noticed that Chang Geng's eyes were like this.

—

Liao Ran was shocked. He had never expected for the Marquis of Order to visit Hu Guo Temple one day, he quickly signed to Chang Geng: "Doesn't he feel unlucky just by a bit of incense? Today, he ventures deep into the tiger's den, will he go back later and wash off a layer of his skin with mugwort leaves*?"

**mugwort leaf is used for driving away evil spirits*

Chang Geng did not have the heart to pay attention to him, an unnatural look flashed by his face.

He was not ready to face Gu Yun coming to inquire about his crime.

In truth, coincidentally, they both assumed they have had too much and did disrespectful things to the other party, each with their own guilty conscience.

Liao Ran gave Chang Geng a strange look. In these years, in order to suppress the Bone of Impurity, Chang Geng have practiced meditation to the extreme that he could sit completely still for up to two or three days, even this monk had to admire.

Sometimes, as an anxious person would look at his eyes, they would be able to calm down with him involuntarily. The incredibly handsome young master dressed in white sitting on the old futon of the monks while holding a chess piece, should have given off the aura of an out-of-this-world serenity. Unexpectedly, it was suddenly shattered by the three words 'Marquis of Order'.

Chang Geng seemed unable to sit still, making a brief movement, inexplicably raising his hand, not knowing what was it that he was trying to reach for. Halfway through, he found out that Liao Ran was looking at him. He forced down his emotions, placed his hand on the tea cup, then uneasily took a sip as a cover up.

Master Liao Ran who used to act mysterious also had to wonder, *"What's the matter, is the Marquis coming to collect debts?"*

Gu Yun came in very quickly, his expression filled with nothing but distaste, as if he wished nothing more than to walk in on tiptoe. Casting a glance towards Liao Ran, he revealed an unamused smile: "Not seeing you for years, the Master had became a lot whiter."

Liao Ran bore the demeanor of a highly educated monk, he did not pay any mind to trivial matters. He stood up, put his hands together to greet then signed: "Amitabha, the monk is like a clear mirror, no dust could catch on."

Turned out a classical quote could also serve as an excuse for not bathing!

He seemed to feel the scent of fermentation again, he could not wait for a moment longer in this place. He turned towards Chang Geng: "You have been disturbing the master's meditation for several days already, it is time to come home."

Chang Geng's heart, which was not easy to settle down, was once again stirred up by the words 'come home'. He knew that even if he stayed under the Bodhi tree*, he still couldn't recite 'existence exactly is non-existence'*. He then put away his anxiousness and stood up obediently.

**Bodhi tree is where Buddha supposedly achieved enlightenment.*
**色即是空, a part of the Buddhist sutra 'The Heart of Prajna Paramita' that is chanted daily in temples for meditation. The sutra teaches about 'Emptiness'.*

The smoked firewood in Hu Guo Temple caused Gu Yun to let out a few coughs, he rushed outside of the Zen room to wait, watching Chang Geng bidding goodbye with boredom.

In fact, with relatives and friends one was used to seeing, it was difficult to notice whether the other was beautiful or unsightly. Gu Yun had always known that Chang Geng resembled his Barbarian mother more, but after careful examination, that was not entirely true. His facial features after growing up was handsome and fair, he momentarily could not tell who he resembled, he only knew that his appearance was like jade, uniquely pleasing to the eye.

Gu Yun was slightly startled, remembering that there were many types of people in this world, especially since the opening of the sea route, the people of Great Liang were quite open minded. Especially along the coast of the Eastern Sea, it was said that relationships between men were also very widespread. Chang Geng was a dragon in the disguise of a fish, would there not be anyone who would be as blind as to tease him?

Was it the reason for why he was angry that day?

"*That's right*," A hole cracked inside Gu Yun's head, countless thoughts running astray like horses without reins: "*If I bit that Shen Ji Ping, he would definitely not take it to heart, someone who was as old-schooled as him would not think to look at it with such idea in mind. If I were to bite him, perhaps it would be me who would suffer a loss.*"

The more he thought, the more it would make sense. The more he thought, the more embarrassing it was. He quickly came to the decision of acting oblivious.

Thus as if nothing happened, he turned to Chang Geng who was coming over and said: "How come you stayed for so long, are the cabbage and tofu of Hu Guo Temple so delicious?"

Chang Geng saw that his expression was calm, his heart was also able to relax, he replied: "Listening to Buddha's teaching and fasting could help ease the mind."

"Young people should enjoy life, you are not planning to be a monk, what are these talks about easing the mind?" Gu Yun walked side by side with him, trying to reach out and put his arm around his shoulder by habit. But just as he raised his hand, for fear that Chang Geng would think too much, he silently retracted it and placed both

hands behind his back.

Chang Geng said calmly: "I have considered it."

He once thought about cutting away three thousand connections of this mortal world to enter Buddha's gate, perhaps his heart full of insolent thoughts would be dispelled into nothing by Buddha's boundless teachings.

"What?" Gu Yun's footsteps came to a halt, he wasn't able to response at first, startled, he unbelievably asked, "... you said becoming a monk?"

Chang Geng rarely saw his surprised expression, he smiled and replied: "I only thought about it, I do not dare to go."

Gu Yun thought: "*Nonsense, if you dare to do it, I would break your leg.*"

However, Chang Geng was no longer a small son who was sheltered in the manor. After his crowning ceremony as Jun Wang, he still called him 'yifu'. This came from affection, not in name only. In the end, it was inconvenient for him to scold him like his real child, thus these words did not leave his mouth.

His expression darkened, asking, "Why?"

Chang Geng greeted a little abbot walking over with courtesy, then replied without hesitation: "In my younger years, I have grown up looking at the calligraphy 'the world cannot be avoided' in your room. Later on, travelling through mountains and rivers with Teacher, only beginning to get a taste of this tough and dangerous world, how could I dare to shy away now?

"Being born in this world, although my abilities are only limited, it was unsure if I could ever achieve one-in-a-thousand-years contributions like the previous generations, but at least, I must not feel ashamed facing the Heaven and Earth, and myself."

.....and you.

The last two words were hidden away in Chang Geng's heart and

were not spoken aloud.

That year, Xiu Niang dragged him behind the horse but was not able to kill him. The Bone of Impurity clinging onto him, even now, still wasn't able to turn him mad. Chang Geng sometimes felt that only when he faced the winds and waves, kept going against the current, to a place where he could finally be content with himself - only then may he be worthy of longing for yifu even just for a little while when awoken at midnight.

Gu Yun's anger seemed to have cooled down, yet he appeared to be unhappy still, sullenly asking: "Then what were you doing in the place of monks?"

Chang Geng replied thoughtlessly: "Finding Master Liao Ran to drink tea, sometimes I could not sleep well when the flame inside was too much - Miss Chen prescribed me with tranquilizer, did she not? I had put some in my pouch, but for some reason, I wasn't able to find it for the last few days."

Gu Yun went silent.

Chang Geng: "I don't know where I had dropped it."

Gu Yun's face was pale blue — some people really do mention things that should not be mentioned.

Marshal Gu went quiet under the torment of his conscience for a while. Then in the end, he reached for Chang Geng's small scented pouch made from leather that he carried inside, placing it in his hand without a word: "Here."

Chang Geng: "..."

This fear came all too sudden. Chang Geng, who accidentally shackled himself with his own ropes, almost bit his tongue. Just now, the *Yan Bei Wang* who bore the aura of an adept scholar — 'going through the mountains and rivers', his palms instantly became soaked with sweat, he stuttered: "How, how come it is at yifu's place?"

Marshal Gu with impenetrable skin that had been through countless training casually replied: "I don't know how it fell onto my

bed. Perhaps on that day when I have had too much, I accidentally pulled it off from you."

Chang Geng looked at him with horror.

Gu Yun feigned innocence and said: "What's wrong?"

Chang Geng shook his head, silently heaving a sigh of relief inside. He knew that this matter was now over, he could still be intimately together with yifu as before. At the same time, however, he inevitably felt some hidden loss.

As Gu Yun saw that his expression was off, he assumed Chang Geng was still bothered by this, he asked with a coaxing tone: "I forgot to tell you two days ago, the Emperor wants you to enter the court to listen to politics, which duty do you want to be in charge of? I will find a way for you."

Chang Geng quickly restrained his train of thoughts, seriously replying: "Six of the departments have their own power and influence, it is not convenient for me to step in and disturb it. These years, neither of my literary or martial arts are up to par, in addition, I have already been used to being leisurely. If His Majesty truly wanted me to come listen, I could listen just for the courtesy of it — or I could follow Master Jiang of Da Li Temple to do investigation."

Gu Yun could not tell whether if this answer truly reflected what Chang Geng thought or not, but it was definitely the answer the Emperor would want to hear. He momentarily felt pained, not willing to send Chang Geng to Emperor Long An's place to waste his talents, being looked down on by others.

But that was impossible. His surname was Li. Even if he would become a leisurely prince in the future, he would not be able to hide in the Marquis' manor for the rest of his life.

"If you want to go to Da Li Temple, wait for a while longer, don't go now," Gu Yun said. "The Emperor wanted to investigate *Ziliujin* black market recently, Master Jiang's place is chaotic enough already, don't intervene, and don't drag Lin Yuan Pavilion into it either."

Chang Geng replied with an '*ah*', he does not seem to be surprised by this news: "So fast? His Majesty was indeed unable to wait, the other day I was still thinking about when he would bring back Rong Jin law."

Gu Yun: "How did you know?"

"Guessed," a slight snow began to fall down, Chang Geng took a paper umbrella from the entrance of the temple — its size was small, yet Chang Geng continued to push the umbrella towards Gu Yun's side.

Not long after, the shoulder that had been exposed to the outside was covered with a layer of snow, he did not bother to wipe it away either, continuing to walk in a pace that was neither slow nor fast, he appeared to be quite enjoying it:

"In truth, it could not be considered to be a guess, yifu, think about it, His Majesty, the former Emperor, even Emperor Wu — although they each were wise in their own way, their stand were the same when it comes to *Ziliujin*. In their hearts, this thing is always regarded as a big problem."

Gu Yun had always seen him as a younger generation. To walk together side by side for the first time, listening to his thoughts, it felt quite fresh. Thus, he did not interrupt him, only listened.

"When I was a child in the town of Yanhui, I saw the imperial court spending many resources for the sake of *Ziliujin*. I have been thinking about it in these recent years: why do we have to strictly control it? If everyone can buy and sell *Ziliujin* as freely as buying food or silk, would it not mean that there will be no more black markets?"

Chang Geng shook his head. "I later realized that it was impossible. Allow me to say a few disrespectful words, regardless of who becomes the Emperor, whether they are wise or incompetent, favored literary arts or favored martial arts - no one could allow the civilians to freely trade *Ziliujin*.

"Otherwise from now on - merchants, foreigners, Eastern Yi

people, the lawless thieves, and even some officials, will all possess these resources,... everyone will hold this blade in their hands."

Gu Yun: "Much like those bandits in the Southern Frontier."

"Correct," Chang Geng said. "This is just a few black markets, just a few bandits. It's just a few hills in the small territory of the Southern Frontier. What would happen if it were to expand into the entirety of Great Liang? What if everyone everywhere possessed this 'blade' in their hands? The imperial court, of course, could not afford to manage the interests of all people. When that time comes, one problem will give birth to another, they will be under the control of the 'largest blade'.

"Who would not want to possess this Dragon-killing blade? People would then fight, biting at each other, without any regard for morality or laws, much like raising worms, waiting until the worm king appeared, whose hands will this nation belong to?"

Gu Yun frowned: "Chang Geng, it is fine for me to listen to these words, don't mention it to others — then according to your point of view, is it necessary to bring back the Rong Jin Law?"

"It is not, in fact, it is best to continue the lax control of the former Emperor, to stabilize, and to solve the most urgent task of finance first.

"Since the appearance of the farming puppets, a major amount of the annual production of food had been left to rot in the storage. The price of rice has become lower and lower, people have switched to stocking money, all the little bit of gold and silver have been hoarded in warehouses, the treasury naturally could not be filled."

"It is impossible for silver to be manifested out of thin air. Increasing the production of money now is just a distant water that cannot quell a nearby fire, we can only rely on the western foreigners. Once the Silk Road is completely opened, with this achievement, yifu's name will forever go down in history, even stabilizing hundred rebellions can not be compared."

"With money, it would be much like a house having its beam, people having their backbone. When that time comes, we can use small flame to simmer, adjusting the internal affairs little by little. The problems would still remain, but the situation will no longer be at grave danger, we would be able to retain peace and stability for the people for a hundred years. After one or two generations, perhaps there could be a way out."

Chang Geng sighed as he got here. "Unfortunately, within two years, both cases of rebellions are related to the black market. It is not surprising for the Emperor's reaction to be a bit excessive — thus I have always suspected the two cases of Eastern Sea and the Southern Frontier were not at all accidental. I'm investigating it using the power of Lin Yuan Pavilion. I have only managed to vaguely discover one line of theirs, yet they were too sharp. You must be careful."

Gu Yun did not speak up for a long while after hearing his words, one could not tell his emotion on his face either. Chang Geng did not bother him, and slowly accompanied him out of Hu Guo Temple. The drums sounded in the temple, echoing in the mountains, there were no other noises in their surrounding, snow silently fell.

Old general Zhong Chan had the ability to stabilize the country, but he could not teach someone to be a talented magistrate who could direct the country and to bring peace to the world. For the first time in his life, Gu Yun felt such deep regret, he thought: "*Why must he bear the surname Li?*"

If he did not bear the surname Li, it would be easy to enter the rank of officials by the imperial examination. Maybe he could have had a strong start, to become a renown magistrate of the generation in the future. He would not have to speak of a few sentences only for him to hear in this rundown temple, claiming he only wanted to be a leisurely Jun Wang — like flowers in a vase.

... All were fate.

Chang Geng: "The weather is not good, yifu is wearing thin clothing, don't go back by horse, sit in my carriage."

Gu Yun was distracted, turning his head as soon as he heard his voice, and unexpectedly met Chang Geng's gaze. Gu Yun's heart was suddenly startled — he had never noticed that Chang Geng's eyes were like this.

His eyes were very focused, slightly reflecting the snow, as if to embrace everything of his inside them.

Chang Geng was first caught off guard, then quickly moved his gaze. Revealing himself further in an attempt to cover his tracks — he bowed down to shake his sleeve, it was already soaking wet, sticking to his arm.

Gu Yun discovered that Chang Geng's shoulder had been covered with a layer of cold ice. But not only did he not speak up about it, he had also been accompanying him slowly.

Gu Yun reached out to touch, it was ice cold: "You..."

As soon as he raised his hand, Chang Geng immediately tensed up slightly, although it was only a moment, it could not escape Gu Yun's eyes.

Gu Yun could be quite informal in private — somewhat unmindful, rarely paying attention to the minor details, but the embarrassment after being drunk on that day was still there, causing him to be involuntarily sensitive.

"Was it an illusion?" Gu Yun thought with surprise and suspicion, then sat in the carriage.

A warm stove was already lit up inside. Gu Yun leaned on one side, closing his eyes to rest. In a state of half-awake and half-asleep, he suddenly could feel someone was coming closer. He did not open his eyes. In the next moment, he could sense Chang Geng placing a thin blanket on him, his movement as light as a feather, as if fearing it would awaken him.

Shen Yi has always thrown it directly on him before, even the most attentive and careful soldier never had such gentle gesture that seemed almost protective such as this.

Gu Yun no longer felt drowsy, he continued to keep his eyes closed and pretended to have fallen asleep with difficulty. He did not dare to move, his neck was stiff, always feeling a pair of eyes looking at him.

There was probably nothing in this world that could be hidden away with no trace forever — only a little careful observation was needed.

The string in Gu Yun's heart quietly tensed, for the next few days, he couldn't help but secretly watch Chang Geng, yet not only did it not help to dispel his inexplicable suspicion, he became more and more frightened.

In addition to a Chang Geng who made him uneasy, he also had to think about the Rong Jin Law and the Emperor's action against the Ziliujin Black Market, while also using a roundabout way to save Master Feng Han — the top most stubborn man of Ling Shu Institute. Both his mental and physical strength were exhausted, utterly miserable.

On the 23rd of the first month, Gu Yun from the capital sent Shen Yi off to the southwest to take office.

On the 25th day of the first month, the Emperor visited the Imperial Garden. Somehow, the Imperial carriage had broken down halfway through. The servant unintentionally said a few words, reminding the Emperor of how Master Feng Han had knelt down on the ground, testing the steam-powered Imperial carriage for him, the flame in his heart was cooled down by a half.

After inquiring about it, it seemed that the old man was all alone. During his imprisonment these few days, aside from a few students from the Ling Shu Institute who came to visit, he did not have even one servant to deliver his meal.

The Emperor was in a good mood. After hearing so, he could not help but feel sorry for the old man, he sighed, ordered for him to be released, only cutting his salary for half a year as a light punishment, and this matter was considered to be pardoned.

With these two things resolved, Gu Yun felt he could not stay in this capital for even a day longer, immediately writing a request for him to return to Lou Lan.

He truly should be on his way by now, the Emperor had no objections, he approved to it on the same day.

The day before his departure, the night was already deep, Gu Yun had went to bed after he finished drinking the medicine. Although Chang Geng had performed acupuncture for him earlier, it could only relieve but could not completely cure the root cause of the headache.

While he was struggling to fall asleep, someone from the palace suddenly arrived, summoning him to meet the Emperor right in the night.

There was no telling whether it was the effect of the medicine or what, Gu Yun's eyelids suddenly twitched.

Chapter 49: Argument

—

Gu Yun watched his figure from behind, his gaze slightly darkened. He thought: *"It can't go on like this anymore. After returning from the palace, I must talk it through with him no matter what."*

—

Gu Yun quickly got up to change his clothes, as he exited the room, he was surprised to find that Chang Geng was staying in the outer chamber. He wasn't sleeping either, it seemed he had just put on his outer coat, holding a small steam lamp in his hand, a half-open book was laying on his knee.

The outer chamber was usually the place for servants to rest during the night. Gu Yun was already accustomed to the simple lifestyle, there was no one staying in at night. Only the old butler would occasionally come over in the middle of the night to add some charcoal to the blazer.

"Chang Geng?" Gu Yun was surprised, "How come you are here? I thought it was Uncle Wang..."

Chang Geng: "I was waiting for you to fall asleep before leaving."

"You are a *Jun Wang*," Gu Yun frowned: "Lowering yourself to stay at a place for servants as such is too inappropriate."

"It is nothing more than a false title, being a servant for yifu would be much better," Chang Geng said faintly, taking down the small pot on the red-hot stove and poured a bowl of herbal tea for Gu Yun: "Is yifu going to the palace? If you are not willing to wear a fur coat, at least drink something first to keep warm."

Gu Yun: "..."

He was flustered, even if he were to marry a wife, she would

probably not be as thoughtful as Chang Geng. When these thoughts just began to manifest, he instantly slapped himself inside: *Bastard, have you gone insane?*

Gu Yun took the cup of herbal tea and drank it. When returning the cup, their fingers accidentally touched. Chang Geng quickly retracted his hand as if he had just been pricked by a sharp needle — then with a seemingly normal expression, he turned around and placed the pot down to its original place.

Gu Yun watched his figure from behind, his gaze slightly darkened. He thought: *"It can't go on like this anymore. After returning from the palace, I must talk it through with him no matter what."*

Outside, the palace servants were making haste, Gu Yun could not delay any longer, he could only hurriedly follow them.

The February night air was biting, Gu Yun's dizzy head blown by the cold wind instantly becoming clear once again, as if he had just undergone acupuncture.

The servant leading the way did not dare to lift his head, walking under the palace wall. On the three steps, there would be a guarding post equipped with bows. All had beast heads, their faces were ferocious, their fangs emitting white steam, the gears in the neck slowly rotating, producing a common abrading sound, causing the red walls in front to seem all the more awe-inspiring, no one would dare to look closely.

The huge palace lantern swinging in mid-air, covered with a layer of clouded air, did not give off a godly aura but instead seemed bleak and ghostly.

The close servant of Emperor Long An led a few people out of the Warm Pavilion, they just happened to be on the opposite side of Gu Yun. They were Westerners, the man leading had white hair, was tall and lean, his facial features were much like a falcon. His eyes were intimidating, his nose was high and hooked, and the lips were almost invisible, only a narrow slit that seemed to have been created by a blade.

Zhu Little Feet quickly took a step forward and paid respect to Gu Yun: "The Marquis — these are the messengers sent by the Pope from the west."

The white-haired man looked at Gu Yun carefully and asked: "Is this the Marquis of Order?"

A layer of thin snow fell on Gu Yun's eyelashes, his entire being was covered in an aura of chilling frost, putting his hands together coldly.

The white-haired man put his hand on his chest: "I did not expect the Marquis of Order to be such a young and handsome man. Pleased to meet you."

Gu Yun: "You have praised too much."

Two groups of people passed by each other, after the foreigners had walked further away, Gu Yun glanced at Zhu Little Feet.

Zhu Little Feet blinked at him, then spoke in a hushed tone: "Just now, there was no telling what those foreigners had said to His Majesty, only that this time, His Majesty seemed to be very high spirited, even constantly telling us to ask the Marquis to come. The Marquis can rest assured, this is not bad news."

This old eunuch was ridiculed by the people for abusing his power, being a sugarcoating subject, but his relationship with Gu Yun was not bad, he could be considered to be someone who had watched Gu Yun grow up. In one occasion, he somehow angered the former Emperor. Happening to come across it, Gu Yun had said a few good words in his stead in front of the former Emperor, saving his small life.

Although Zhu Little Feet's character was rotten, but unexpectedly, he was very understanding when it came to repaying favors, always remembering this little act of goodwill. With saving Master Feng Han a few days ago, it was also thanks to his assistance from the inside.

However, as he said so, Gu Yun did not dare to rest assured.

If the Emperor was not very happy, he could have the general ideas — for a larger part, perhaps someone had accused him of buying *Ziliujin* from the black market in the past.

They could accuse him all they want, anyway, either way, Gu Yun had thoroughly cleaned up his trace, there was no evidence, the worst case scenario was to battle with words... but what could it mean if His Majesty was 'very high spirited'?

Gu Yun's eyelids twitched even more.

When he entered, Li Feng was looking down at a report. Emperor Long An under the lamplight did not appear to be very lively. He seemed more sickly than Gu Yun who had just been tormented by a headache. Not waiting for him to greet, Li Feng already waved his hand, his attitude incredibly peaceful: "There is no one else here, uncle does not have to be over-courteous with me."

Li Feng turned Zhu little feet: "Go ask if there are still any ginseng soup left from dinner, give uncle a bowl to warm his hands."

"Suddenly being thoughtful," Gu Yun sighed in his heart. *"If this won't be a trick, it would be robbery*."

Li Feng was not aware of how Gu Yun was ridiculing him inside, he asked with quite a cheerful expression: "I remember uncle said last time that a part of Fu Zhi Cheng's *Ziliujin* was from the Southern Sea?"

Gu Yun: "Yes, please forgive your subject's incompetence, I could not find out the source for these *Ziliujin*."

Li Feng did not get mad: "It's alright, those traitors are very wicked, the uncle is unfamiliar with their terrain, managing to break through the thief's secret passage, capturing them in one swift move — are already considered to be a great achievement. If you claim to be incompetent, then shouldn't all the magistrates and officers in the court be fired already?"

Gu Yun couldn't figure out what his intention might be, quickly replying with an "I do not dare."

"The *Ziliujin* black market in the territory of Great Liang is extremely unruly." Li Feng said, quickly diverting the topic. "This time, I sent people to conduct a private investigation in disguise and found that a large part of the supply actually came from outside the country."

Gu Yun immediately understood as he heard this that those officials who leaked the goods in the territory have already received news through various connections. They had all quieted down and assessed the direction of the wind. What Jiang Chong and his men discovered were only some small fishes and shrimps that were secretly digging from the mines, thus he kept quiet and listened.

Li Feng continued his words: "Uncle often walks in the frontiers, you must be a lot more knowledgeable than those of us sitting in the capital all day much like frogs sitting at the bottom of a well, do you know where these private miners usually travel to?"

Gu Yun: "To answer His Majesty, they are generally on the grasslands of the Northern Barbarian."

"Correct," Li Feng laughed. "Although that's not all — Uncle, come look at this."

Gu Yun hesitantly accepted the confidential report Li Feng threw to him, as he swept his eyes over it, his mind suddenly exploded.

The report listed in details every single trading line the private miners sell their *Ziliujin* to, Gu Yun knew most of them by heart, except for the last one that read — *'Lou Lan Kingdom'*.

How come Lou Lan is here?

Li Feng: "So?"

Countless thoughts raced through Gu Yun's heart, cold sweat quickly breaking out: "Your Majesty, the Black Iron Camp and Lou Lan Kingdom have been neighbors for many years. I have never been aware that there is a *Ziliujin* mine in Lou Lan, please pardon my rudeness, dare I ask who had brought forth this report? What is their evidence?"

"Hey, Uncle has thought too much," Li Feng said with a smile. "I have never said that you have connections with those thieves who were privately mining, there is nothing strange about you not knowing about this matter."

Gu Yun took a deep breath, indicating that he was listening carefully.

Li Feng: "It's a long story. Uncle had moved out with your troops to the Southern Frontier from September last year. When you were not here, Lou Lan Kingdom had asked the Black Iron Camp soldiers who stationed behind for help, as they wanted to encircle and eliminate a group of bandits.

"At that time General Qiu Wen Shan had sent out troops, later bringing back complete victory, killing hundreds of desert bandits, and rescued a group of Tian Zhu merchants who they captured. Because these merchants had the border pass of Great Liang, General Qiu had escorted them to the West Station. Unexpectedly, they later discovered at the station the merchants' passes were fake."

Li Feng was in a very good mood, he deliberately stopped as he got here, as if to increase curiosity. Unexpectedly, he could only see Gu Yun solemnly listening with an unusual grave expression as he looked back, there was no intention of inquiring him of what happened next either. The Emperor could not help but felt somewhat irritated.

He had no choice but to continue unhappily: "According to the law, those who forged border passes should be referred to the general protection office for investigation and be dealt with. After checking, the northwestern governor discovered that these Tian Zhu people are no merchants, they are a group of 'Gold Fighters' from the *Ziliujin* black market!"

'Gold Fighters' were those who risk their lives to smuggle *Ziliujin*.

"Coincidentally, at that time, my secret envoys have just arrived in the Western Region, their feet had not yet met the ground yet these gold fighters have already walked themselves into the nest. According to the thieves' confession, they were originally active in

the private mine outside the Southern gate. Recently, they got their hands on a 'treasure map', showing a large number of *Ziliujin* mines in Lou Lan kingdom, thus they had come to try their luck.

"You say, is this not surprising? I had actually figured out what is under their land even before Lou Lan people themselves."

Gu Yun remembered the group of desert bandits he caught four years ago, his hairs stood up all at once.

Those bandits had already been secretly silenced by him and Shen Yi. Afterwards, Gu Yun had sent people to investigate more than once, he had never found the so-called '*Ziliujin* Mine', and did not encounter a similar thing again.

Unexpectedly, a few years later, when this matter was gradually being thrown into the back of his mind, it returned under this circumstance!

And...why was the person who ordered the departure of the troops Qiu Wen Shan?

In the Black Iron Camp, Qiu Wen Shan was in charge of defense, who had never managed matters concerning the business road before. Otherwise, if replaced by an experienced person, they would absolutely not directly transfer those people without verifying the authenticity of the document. The Northwestern Guardian was directly under the Central Government. Once transferred, the Black Iron Camp will no longer have the right to intervene with any matters coming after.

Gu Yun took Shen Yi with him, but the leaders of the three major factions were still there. Where did they all disappear to?

Gu Yun: "Pardon your subject's rudeness, dare I ask Your Majesty, what was the time for the bandits' invasion?"

Li Feng: "At the end of last year, what's the matter?"

Gu Yun forced a smile: "It's nothing, your subject only felt that it was a bit strange, bandits from the Western Regions have been cleaned up for a long time now, why did they suddenly appear?"

His head became more and more painful. It seemed that the force of the medicine which Chang Geng suppressed with acupuncture had turned up again.

That's right, at the end of last year, there was a major market gathering on the Silk Road bringing together countless nations, the Black Iron Camp have had to increase the distribution of personnel for protection. The annual tributes transporting from the Northern Frontier back to the capital also moved past the northwest area, usually requiring a part of Black Cavalry as well... hence why everyone had moved out.

Why must they choose this exact time?

How come as the Northwestern Guardian's just discovered the 'Golden Fighter', the Emperor's secret envoy also instantly arrived, leaving no room for maneuver?

Moreover, how come he had never received any news regarding this matter, not before it happened, and not after?

The string in Gu Yun's head tensed up, his thoughts in a mess, suddenly finding it hard to breathe inside this warm pavilion where it was spring all throughout the year.

Li Feng: "The Western Region's bandits usually circle around outside Great Liang, with no letter for assistance, it's not convenient for you to mobilize troops, it truly wasn't easy for you to deal with them. But today, I especially asked Uncle to come, not to ask about how many bandits are out there, but to give Uncle an important task."

Gu Yun looked up at him.

Li Feng's gaze was like flame: "The secret envoy in disguise had now infiltrated the inland territory of Lou Lan. I am afraid for about eighty to ninety percent, there is indeed a rare *Ziliujin* mine from Lou Lan underground... does uncle understand my meaning?"

Gu Yun's heart slowly sank, forcing out each word: "Pardon my ignorance, Your Majesty please make it clearer."

Li Feng patted his shoulder, Gu Yun's body seemed to forever unable to be warm. Whenever and wherever he might be, he would always resemble a piece of stone that had been submerged in frozen ice for three days.

"To tell you the truth, Uncle must have already known, our Great Liang is chaotic both inside and out," Li Feng sighed, "I am very distressed, I have nowhere and no one to let them out to when awakened at midnight, an entire nation pressing on your shoulders is no easy task."

Gu Yun cautiously chose the right words then keenly responded: "Your Majesty is occupied with hundreds and thousands of responsibilities, you are the hope of the people, you must take care of your body.

"I am not very knowledgeable in government affairs, but in the past few years, I have seen the Silk Road being built up little by little. Every year is livelier, more prosperous than the last. The major merchants in the northwest have begun to travel outside the country. Central Plains people have always been diligent and hard-working, your subject believes that in just three or five years, this prosperity can spread to the whole territory of Great Liang, when that time comes..."

Although he was resilient in his response, Li Feng was not stupid, he, of course, was able to understand the rejection.

To the currently very enthusiastic Emperor Long An, his roundabout speech was much like a bucket of cold water.

"Subject Gu," Li Feng suddenly changed his pronouns, arbitrarily interrupting him: "You truly don't understand government affairs. Business travels have indeed been able to make money in the past few years, but can you guarantee that this will continue to last? The things of these business people, do you know them full well? I wasn't aware, that in addition to being able to kill the enemy, the Marquis of Order also understands the way of business and trade."

The Emperor was truly irritated now.

Gu Yun knew that when he heard the two words *'Subject Gu'*, he should immediately shut up and do as he was told.

He was silent for a moment, the steam lamp behind the Emperor did not know why, its fire suddenly became unstable, creating a small sparkling noise.

Gu Yun thought, a few days ago, he still vowed to Master Jiang he 'did not dare to underestimate this body'...

Li Feng raised his hand and rubbed his temple, repressing his anger, finding a way out for the both of them. He stiffly said: "Forget it, you should return to rest first. I leave this matter to you. Go back and think about it. Spring has yet to arrive, the northwest is freezing cold, you do not have to hurry back over there..."

"Your Majesty." Gu Yun narrowed his eyes, suddenly lifting his robes and knelt down. He once said he would not fight for meaningless temper and righteousness, but this was not simply the matter of temper and righteousness.

"Your Majesty forgive me," Gu Yun said slowly. "*Ziliujin* is of course of important, but pardon your subject's stupidity, I could not comprehend the deeper meaning of Your Majesty's action. It was not easy for the Silk Road to become as prosperous and peaceful as right now, Your Majesty would truly abandon it regardless only for a little amount of *Ziliujin*?"

"The Silk Road can become what it is today, subject Gu's contribution could not be denied, I understood that after too many years of hard work, you cannot bear to... you think I don't feel pained?"

Li Feng resisted his temper and patiently explained: "But a big country resembling a large rundown house, wind blowing from four sides, as soon as there are rains, one will have to work hard to pull down the East Wall to make up the West Wall. Is there any place that does not have to be stretched?'

Gu Yun sneered inside, it was not convenient for it to be shown on his face, thus he only feigned indifference.

"The ground is cold, I can see uncle's complexion is not good, even the scent of medicine on your body had not scattered yet, don't keep kneeling like that." Li Feng seems to have cooled down, trying to be sensible with Gu Yun, "I remember as a child, Tutor Lin had said: the power of a country lies within the two arms - 'God-sent' and 'Man-made'. Does uncle remember?"

Gu Yun: "I do. 'God-sent' are mountains, grass, grains, soil and fish, the *Ziliujin* underground; 'Man-made' are the teachings passed down from previous wise men, industrial and trading, craftsmanship, machines and armors. These two, resembling the beams, can still stand if one of them remain, but both cannot be broken at the same time, a ruler should remember this."

"Uncle truly memorized all that you have read," Li Feng lowered his eyes and looked at him. "Now these two beams have both been hollowed out by insects, what am I supposed to do?"

Gu Yun actually wanted to reply: *"If you weren't pushing the implementation of that ridiculous Zhang Ling law, perhaps there would not be so many insects,"* but it was useless to say so, just look at Master Feng Han who now hugged his dog children to reflect on his actions behind closed doors.

One asking and the other one answering reminded Li Feng of when they used to study together at a young age. When Gu Yun was a child, his body was in poor health, always fell ill, all day taking medicine. His personality was no better either, never caring for anyone. But towards his brothers, however, he was very aware of his role being an 'uncle'. Although he was even younger than *Wei Wang*, whenever there was anything delicious or fun, he would always save it for them, never fought for it or kept it to himself. When questioned, he would answer; when asked, he would give. Li Feng had once liked him very much.

"Get up," Li Feng's last bit of anger faded. "Uncle is the sharp blade of this country, I still need to rely on you to stabilize all four sides."

Gu Yun heard his words, slowly bent over, his forehead slightly touched his fingertips on the ground.

Li Feng breathed a sigh of relief, assuming he had successfully persuaded this man — Gu Yun had become wiser with his actions in the past few years, very understanding of the current affairs, not easily blown up with just the slightest touch like before. His neither light nor heavy opposition just now was perhaps only an overreaction from hearing the words *'Lou Lan'*...

Lou Lan... Gu Yun had been staying there for more than five years, his feelings must be deep, this was not incomprehensible.

With such a thought, Li Feng's heart became softer, he intended to reach out and help Gu Yun up.

Unexpectedly, his hand has not yet extended, but Gu Yun has already straightened up and said calmly:

"Your Majesty, Lou Lan is small, but they have always remained great friends with our court. That year when countless Western Region countries rebelled, our army was besieged in the golden sand dunes for more than twenty days, the only side who secretly sent information and supplied us with rations and medicine was Lou Lan. Later, many countries, such as the Western foreigners, Western Regions, and Tian Zhu...signing the Silk Road treaty with Great Liang, Lou Lan had also served as an —"

Li Feng's hand hung stiffly in the air, stunned by Gu Yun's words, he then immediately turned furious, loudly shouting: "Enough!"

"Aiming at other countries' natural resources, invading and taking siege, that is inhumane; Throwing away old favors, betraying one's promise, that is unjust!" Gu Yun did not seem to have had 'enough' in the slightest — each word like a blade, clashing onto the floor of the pavilion.

Li Feng was shaking with rage: "Shut up!"

He turned his hand over the table, sweeping the papers onto the floor, immediately picking up an ink container and violently threw it — Gu Yun did not hide either, letting the container strongly hit the shoulder of his Light Armor, the sound of the impact echoing. The still wet ink dripped down from the chest of Marquis of Order's

formal attire.

Li Feng: "Gu Yun, what do you want to do?"

Gu Yun slowly forced out each word: "An inhumane and unjust army is no good fortune. Black Iron Camp's 50,000 soldiers, although not afraid of death, we do not dare to accept this command either. His Majesty please recall your order."

Chapter 50: Murderous

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Whether it was a mantra to clear the heart or to clear the lungs, all were blown up by this sentence, scattering into ashes.

—

The brazier outside the West Warm Pavilion would automatically add charcoal after every period of time. The large gears the size of a bowl were interlocked. Whether it was changing charcoal or letting out smoke, all were carried out in an orderly manner, a stream of white smoke emitted from behind, occasionally letting out noises that resembled a sigh.

Inside the pavilion, the ruler and the subject — one kneeling , one standing — clashed in a tense argument. Li Feng's hand clasped the edge of the wooden table carved into the design of a dragon, rows of blue veins popping up, grumbling out each word: "You say it again."

Gu Yun had finished speaking of everything he needed to, he also understood to not oppose the Emperor excessively. He took one step back first: "Your subject deserves death."

Li Feng's face appeared ashen, turning the white jade ring between his fingers like mad, his state of mind extremely unstable.

Gu Yun whispered: "It's just that for the matter concerning the Silk Road, pulling one strand of hair would affect the whole body, Your Majesty please consider it carefully."

Li Feng solemnly asked: "Does the Marquis of Order think that, besides you, there are no other available general in my hands?"

It had already come to this, to continue on will only result in a quarrel. Gu Yun simply stayed silent, pretending he was already

dead.

At this time, Zhu Little Feet suddenly walked into the Warm Pavilion, reporting in a small voice: "Your Majesty, Imperial Uncle had arrived, he is currently awaiting your order outside..."

In the occasion when the Emperor was furious, if there were any subjects visiting, the palace servants would generally persuade them to wait a little longer outside the hall. This action of Zhu Little Feet bore the intention of trying to find a way out for them. Gu Yun looked at him and blinked, expressing his appreciation.

Li Feng's eyelids twitched, a few harsh curves forming on his facial feature. He looked down on Gu Yun and said coldly: "The Marquis should go cool off outside then, avoid getting your head dulled by the smoke, not understanding what you should say or what you should not say!"

Gu Yun: "Your Majesty, take care of your body."

After he finished, he quickly bowed and went to kneel in the midst of the snow outside the Warm Pavilion, truly going to 'cool off'.

Li Feng stared at his retreating back with a grave and ferocious look, Imperial Uncle Wang Guo coming in after did not dare to breathe out, silently standing on the side and waited. An oblivious young servant stepping forward — intending to clean up the scattered ink container from crashing onto the Marquis of Order just now — was suddenly pinned down on the spot by Zhu Little Feet's gaze. His body stiffened, after a moment of silence, was finally able to run along the walls and disappear.

Wang Guo assessed the Emperor's face, lowering his voice to advise: "Your Majesty, that Marquis of Order is young and eager to win, moreover, he also lived among those crude soldiers at the frontier. Sometimes stepping out of line is unavoidable, there is no need for Your Majesty to be angry because of him."

Li Feng did not speak up for a long time.

That year, Emperor Yuan He chose his eldest son to be the

Crown Prince, for he was diligent, yet did not lack in wits. He had the potential to be a wise ruler, more than enough to be an Emperor who could preserve what the previous generations built up.

When Li Feng first succeeded the throne, he did indeed meet the expectations of the former Emperor. However, one thing was undeniable — Emperor Yuan He had left behind for his son a very messy state of affairs. What Great Liang's imperial court was in need of right now was a ruler with both resolution and vision. The talent to preserve won't be enough.

Since Emperor Long An's ascension, it could be said that nothing he did had gone according to plan. When awakened at night, he often asked himself: "Will I be able to carry this nation?"

But a person — especially a person of high position, if he always asked himself this question — generally, would be unable to bear it when others also questioned him the same thing.

Wang Guo's face went stiff from smiling: "Your Majesty..."

Li Feng suddenly interrupted him: "Imperial Uncle, recently, there is one problem in my heart — The Black Tiger Emblem is given by Emperor Wu, why did Gu Yun take the initiative to return it to me so easily?"

Wang Guo was taken aback, boldly staring at Emperor Long An. He felt that this question was truly superfluous — is the Emperor looking forward and wishing for Gu Yun to stir up the Heaven, or simply to rebel?

"This...," Wang Guo quickly calculated, not knowing what could be the appropriate words to say, he had no choice but to choose flattery to keep guard from a monarch's unpredictable heart. "The Emperor is a wise ruler of the generation, us subjects must dedicate our all to serve. This is only a meager emblem, even if Your Majesty wants our lives, who would complain?"

Li Feng laughed lightly: "I am afraid that it isn't so, Imperial Uncle. It took me until today to understand it. In fact, whether Gu Yun returned the emblem or not does not make a difference, the

major commanders of all four sides, how many belonged to Gu family's party? Right now for military affairs, the Marquis' words are even more effective than my own, the emblem was only a symbolic object, with no usefulness to him either way."

When Li Feng spoke, his tone of voice was gentle, much like a casual afternoon chat. But Wang Guo involuntarily trembled as he heard these words, he only felt that the murderous intent in this sentence was almost overflowing.

"I originally summoned Imperial Uncle into the palace today today to discuss about Lou Lan's business, but forget it." Li Feng tiredly waved his hand. "You can go, I am also quite exhausted."

Wang Guo quickly responded and exited the West Warm Pavilion.

No one knew what happened this year, it was clear they have already passed the season of the Rain Water*, but snow in the capital continued to fall one after another, long and endless. Gu Yun had only been kneeling for half an hour, a layer of thin ice had already formed on his formal attire, the black iron on his shoulders covered by fine snow became all the more unimaginably cold.

*雨水 *The "Rain Water",*
the second of the twenty-four solar terms,
around February 18th, 19th, or 20th

Wang Guo hurriedly passed by, taking a glimpse at the handsome and bloodless profile of the prestigious Marquis of Order, and secretly sighed inside. He pitied him — but it was nothing more than that. Wang Guo was a smart man, he understood full well who had bestow upon him his current position of being 'under one person, but above thousands'. He also understood what it was that he should do.

Just like that, the capital's night became heavier and heavier.

Waiting after Li Feng fell asleep, Zhu Little Feet gathered his courage, opened an umbrella, and shakily came to see Gu Yun.

Gu Yun was about to be buried in the snow, Zhu Little Feet scolded the servants waiting in the hallway: "Useless servants, under such a big snow, you still don't know where to find an umbrella for the Marquis! Are your eyes just used for decoration?"

In the eyes of the young servants, Zhu Little Feet whose was mocked by thousands of people was already a top official, they suddenly became scared to death, trembling greatly.

Gu Yun blinked the snow forming on his eyelashes away, casually saying: "Eunuch, don't scare the children. His Majesty told me to come out here to cool down, how am I supposed to do so with an umbrella."

Zhu Little Feet hurriedly ran in front of Gu Yun, intending to help sweep away the snow on his body. Unexpectedly, he let out a startling sound as he reached out his hand — the cold black iron on Gu Yun's shoulders almost peeled off a layer of skin from his soft and plump hand. The old eunuch trembled while complaining:

"My Marquis, why must you quarrel with His Majesty? Kneeling here all night long, it would be a miracle if your legs do not get hurt. In the end, it would only mean to subject yourself to suffering, what must you do this for?"

Gu Yun smiled: "It's nothing, us people practicing martial arts have thick skin and sturdy flesh — I was a little hot-headed back then, I have said too much, troubling the Eunuch for your concern in my stead."

Zhu Little Feet thought about it, then lowered his voice: "How about I send someone to call for *Yan Bei Wang*, let him enter the palace tomorrow morning, and say a few words to His Majesty?"

Gu Yun shook his head again: "Don't involve him, I'm alright."

Zhu Little Feet pondered about it for a moment, but in the end, there was nothing that could be done. He was also afraid that

Emperor Long An would have orders when he woke up. Not daring to leave the Emperor's side for too long, he left the umbrella down for Gu Yun.

"Eunuch Zhu," Gu Yun suddenly stopped him, whispered: "Thank you, but you should take back this umbrella."

Zhu Little Feet was taken aback.

Gu Yun: "I will kneel here for a while until His Majesty's anger cooled down, you are the one who serves by his side, don't let him think too much."

He vaguely hinted, but Zhu Little Feet would of course understand. The old eunuch heaved a sigh: "When the Marquis quarreled with His Majesty, if you still remembered to be this mindful, you would not have had to catch this northwest wind."

With Zhu Little Feet gone, Gu Yun exhaled out white smoke. In a state of boredom, he carefully pondered about what Chang Geng had said to him at Hu Guo Temple — the Eastern Sea disaster, and the southwest riot, perhaps were not accidental.

Slowly, Gu Yun managed to form a faint line.

Wei Wang placed his troops in the Eastern Sea and intended to use naval warfare as a breakthrough.

Gu Yun captured the Eastern Sea rebel army at that time, not costing him a single soldier. Compared with the wave that was subsequently launched afterward, this matter could be said to resemble 'a small head but heavy feet'.

The entirety of the court had boiled up because of this, Jiangnan Navy was thoroughly cleaned from top to bottom. The Emperor once exhausted Ling Shu Institute's resources, intending to build up one branch of Dragons, causing the military expenses of forces all four sides to be cut down even further.

The bigger impact was that the Eastern Sea disaster directly gave birth to the 'Zhang Ling Law', to restrict the common folk Mechanics, and the Drumming Order, to gather the national military power —

the latter directly aimed at Gu Yun himself. Thinking about it now, in retrospect, Emperor Long An did not raise him any trouble for no reason; perhaps, his actions in Jiangnan that time did not go unnoticed by the Emperor.

The introduction of the Drumming Order immediately intensified the contradiction between garrisons everywhere and the court, and it was the source for the case of Fu Zhi Cheng.

Gu Yun was present at the southwest, directly inside this trap, thus he had a clearer feel for the hand that had stirred up this muddy water — someone had deliberately provoked the contradiction between the mountain bandits and Fu Zhi Cheng, then made use of that moronic Kuai Lan Tu to intensify it, choosing the right moment to lit the detonator, letting it explode in front of Gu Yun. Tying the mountain bandits and Fu Zhi Cheng together as a gift, through the hands of the Black Iron Camp, packaged and given to the Emperor in the capital.

What would the Emperor think of this?

He would be horrified to find that although he has restricted the circulation of *Ziliujin* inside the country, there still existed sources from overseas.

Gu Yun suddenly remembered, he and Shen Yi had spent a long time in Lou Lan, from investigation to gathering informations, they have done it all, yet they have never been able to find this legendary 'Lou Lan Treasure'.

Yet when the Emperor sent out a bunch of secret agents who were completely unfamiliar with the territory, only in a few days, they would dare to report that they were 'eighty to ninety percent' certain?

Were these secret agents exceptionally skilled? Or was someone deliberately guiding their hands?

The snow was falling harder and harder, Gu Yun shivered. Behind him, a branch of plum blossom weighed by the heavy snow, broke then fell onto the ground, shattering to pieces.

Chang Geng was awakened by the sound of a broken tree branch.

Gu Yun did not return for the entire night, he had also waited for him the entire night, leaning on the bed, all his dreams were strange nightmares. At this time, the sky was shining, the night had not passed by yet, but the window sill reflected by the light of the snow had become bright. Chang Geng suddenly got up and opened the door, just in time to see Uncle Wang running over.

"Uncle Wang, slow down," Chang Geng stopped him. "What's the matter?"

Even with the cold wind, the old butler was breaking out in hot sweat: "Your Highness, there is news coming out from the palace, saying that yesterday, there was no telling what the Marquis had quarreled with the Emperor about, but the Emperor was furious..."

Chang Geng's pupil contracted.

After a while, a horse left the yard of the Marquis' manor during the night, riding the snow surging forward the direction of Hu Guo Temple.

The next day, there was no major court session, Emperor Long An did not need to get up too early, but the flame inside was too hot, he wasn't able to get a good night's sleep, waking up with a headache and dizziness.

Zhu Little Feet came over and help pressing the temples for Emperor Long An, talking while he did so: "Your Majesty, the Tian Zhu incense sent by Master Liao Chi some time ago can help in clearing the heart and soothing the nerves, when using it last time

you have also praised its effectiveness, how about I burn some more for you?"

Li Feng made a sound in response, then after a while of thinking, he asked: "Is the master still in the palace?"

Throughout the first month, the head monk of Hu Guo Temple — Master Liao Chi — would live in the palace to pray for the blessing of Great Liang, while giving lectures to the strong believer of Buddha, Emperor Long An.

Zhu Little Feet quickly replied: "Yes, I heard that the master has already gotten up early for morning meditation, regardless of wind or rain. Your servant can see that Your Majesty's eyelids had turned red, perhaps it was due to having fire in your heart, should I tell the master to come read a few scriptures to help you calm down?"

Li Feng smiled and said: "How disrespectful, Master Liao Chi is a highly educated monk of our times, do you think of him as a street performer?"

Zhu Little Feet smiled apologetically and hit his face: "Look at this old servant's mouth, my knowledge was lacking, becoming a joke again -— although I do not understand much, but every time I listen to the sound of the master's wooden knocker, I would also feel all the troubles in my heart fade away."

Upon hearing him mentioning so, Li Feng had a change of mind, after thinking about it, he agreed: "Trouble the master for a trip here then."

Zhu Little Feet responded, quickly asked people to send the message, then silently assisting the Emperor in washing his face and changing clothes. Li Feng suddenly asked: "Where is Gu Yun?"

Zhu Little Feet had been dying to mention this, but did not dare to ask, upon hearing his question, he immediately answered: "Your Majesty, the Marquis is still kneeling outside the pavilion."

Li Feng seemed to have let out a snort, his expression indifferent, Zhu Little Feet did not dare to mention this matter too many times,

he could only secretly hope that the old monk — the unreliable rescuer could be a bit useful.

It didn't take long for Master Liao Ran to arrive at the Warm Pavilion. He only took one glance, casually passed by, as if he had never seen the snowman outside.

However, no one knew what spell the old monk of the Hu Guo Temple had cast on the Emperor. He went in for a moment, Zhu Little Feet had already swiftly ran out. First, he read the decreed with enthusiasm: "Order from the Emperor; The Marquis had disrespectful manners in front of the Son of Heaven, paying no regard to the monarch — temporarily confiscating the marshal seal, ordering to return to the manor to reflect on your actions, cutting three months of wage."

Gu Yun was startled.

Zhu Little Feet signaled him with his eyes.

Gu Yun: "...Your subject heeds the decree.."

Zhu Little Feet slapped his thigh, raised his voice to call the servants on the other side: "Look at this lots of monkeys with no eyes!! What are you still standing there for? Hurry and help the Marquis up!"

He didn't even finish commanding, yet Gu Yun had already stood up, his limbs were like needles, pinning through the formal attire and the steel armor, the snow water had soaked all over his body, and an unspeakable chill was eating its way to the bones. Gu Yun put his hands together to greet Zhu Little Feet, then with his heart filled with concern, he exited the palace. At the same time, he also wondered: "*Had the bald donkey been possessed? Why would he save me?"*

...Until he saw his Chang Geng waiting for him outside the palace gate.

Gu Yun: "Turned out Hu Guo temple was dragged here by you, I was still thinking how could that bald donkey be so kind."

Starting from when Chang Geng first heard about how Gu Yun

had been kneeling all night in a big snow, the Bone of Impurity in his body had began to act up regardless of right or wrong. However, his heart could not afford to fall into chaos, he had recited the tranquilizing mantra over and over again, walking back and forth the palace gate like a caged beast.

Even though he had prepared himself, Gu Yun appeared even more miserable than what he had imagined. Chang Geng's brain exploded, feeling the rushing blood was about to reach his throat.

Without any explanation, he first covered Gu Yun with thick fox fur, then reached out to touch his pale blue face. Gu Yun had been frozen for a night, even if his skin was thick, his reaction speed could not help but become slower, he was touched by him.

But this gesture of his was truly embarrassing, not able to hide from it, Gu Yun had to joke: "Can feel out how much my bones weigh already?"

There was no telling whether this person's heart could contain mountains or if he truly had no heart, already ended up like this but still cracking jokes!

Chang Geng dragged Gu Yun on the carriage without saying a word, his eyes red from the pain he felt inside.

As soon as he entered, warmth hit Gu Yun's face, he rubbed his hands together and turned to ask Chang Geng: "Is there wine, give me a bowl."

Chang Geng did not speak up.

Gu Yun tilted his head to look at him and saw that his eyes were as red as bleeding, he couldn't help but smile: "My gods, I have never seen you cry since childhood, truly opening my eyes today. Let's hurry up and call Uncle Wang to bring out the basin. Just in time, the Emperor fined me three months of salary, we can rely on your golden beans to eat."

Of course, Chang Geng was not crying. He was repressing his murderous intent and various illusions inside, his whole body

seemingly wanted to explode.

Gu Yun finally noticed that his eyes were abnormal: "Chang Geng?"

Chang Geng forced himself back to reality, stiffly said: "Yifu, change your clothes first."

His voice was hoarse as if two rusty old irons were scraping together. Gu Yun frowned, he quickly untied his wet hair, took the dry clothes from the carriage and began to change.

Chang Geng did not dare to look at him. He sat on his side, lowered his eyes, and breathed in and out according the method Miss Chen taught him. But the sound of rustling clothes that was clearly so low and clearly so easy to be suppressed by the rumble of the carriage, at this time it seemed to have mutated, continuously drilling into his ears. The more he tried to breathe, the more unstable he became.

Gu Yun placed his hair crown onto the small table in the carriage, the sound awakening Chang Geng: "I cooked a little medicine to disperse the cold, you first..."

His voice silenced, Gu Yun's ice cold fingers had grasped his wrist.

Chang Geng was agitated for a moment, wanted to retract his hand, but Gu Yun was tightly holding on to him, he could only call out in a small voice: "Yifu..."

"I don't know much about taking pulse," Gu Yun's expression was incredibly serious. "But I know what is practicing gone wrong that could cause madness."

Chang Geng rushed away from his gaze in a panic.

"Chang Geng, tell me the truth, do you..." As Gu Yun got here, he paused from feeling self-conscious, even if his heart was as vast as the sea, his skin was as thick as the palace wall, he could also feel that the following words were not suitable to speak aloud.

Chang Geng seemed to have felt something, and slowly lifted his red eyes.

Gu Yun was silent for a while, mustering up an even bigger courage than when he opposed the Emperor: "Do you have any matter you couldn't speak of?"

After a few gasps for air, Chang Geng whispered, "Which matter does yifu mean?"

Gu Yun: "...men and women."

Whether it was a mantra to clear the heart or to clear the lungs, all were blown up by this sentence, scattering into ashes.

Chapter 51: Romance

Happy Valentines' Day~ ^^ enjoy this sad chapter

P.S. sinaya on AO3 has provided the SPL fandom its very first English fic ٩(□ω□)۶do check it out! Link is in the comment for this line :)

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At the very end of the Bone of Impurity, there was one Gu Yun.

—

When Gu Yun finished, he could instantly feel Chang Geng's pulse beat a little faster. It was almost impossible to count anymore. The wrist that he was grasping in his palm was burning hot, there seemed to be a volcano hidden under the vein at the verge of exploding even with only a touch, wanting to cut Chang Geng's veins into little pieces.

Gu Yun did not expect that although he had been flexible in this matter, Chang Geng would actually react this strongly. Worried that something had gone wrong, he reached out a hand to Chang Geng's chest: "Calm yourself, don't think excessively!"

Chang Geng pulled his hand down, grasping it in his own, the joints of his bone cracking. Gu Yun narrowed his eyes.

Chang Geng's face was pale, his eyes like blood, infinite phantoms flashing in front of the eyes. There were thousands of troops beating their drums, demon and ghosts swaying, a part of Bone of Impurity drinks the blood from his heart, becoming stronger, countless thorn-filled branches expanding, stuck on his throat, tearing at his insides...

But at the very end of the Bone of Impurity, there was one Gu Yun.

... separated by thousands of miles.

Gu Yun was utterly frightened, his lips moved slightly, but did

not know how to proceed.

At this moment, Chang Geng clasped Gu Yun's hand and held it to his chest. He seemed to have let out a faint choked sound, then closed his eyes, pressing his trembling lips on the back of Gu Yun's ice cold hand, cracked from freezing.

Although Gu Yun already had a few uneasy speculations, he did not anticipate this scene in advance. Chang Geng's burning breath flowed inside his sleeve, his scalp seemingly wanting to explode. The words 'Are you mad?' were about to leave his mouth.

Chang Geng suddenly pushed him away, then retreated half a step. With his whole body curled up, he bent down and vomited out a mouthful of darkened blood.

Gu Yun: "..."

This chain of events happened as fast as a flash of lightning. Gu Yun had yet to feel angry, but panic already came first. Aside from being shocked, all the words stuck inside his throat were painful, he could only stay dumbfounded in one place.

Chang Geng's face appeared as bleak as ash. After spitting out the bruised blood, his heart had become clearer, his senses gradually returned. He turned his head away from Gu Yun's outstretched helping hand, whispering: "I have offended yifu, whether you want to beat me or to scold me,...*cough*, I absolutely will not resist."

Gu Yun inhaled a whiff of cold air. There were many concerns inside of him, forming into long lectures that could be comparable to quoting Shen Ji Ping's words, yet he did not dare to say even one of them. The suffocation was unbearable, he thought to himself: *"I haven't tried to question him of his wrongdoing, yet he had already vomited blood first. Damn it, would I still dare to open my mouth?"*

He bent over, holding Chang Geng up and placed him on a board inside the spacious carriage. Gathering a heart full of thoughts, he scolded in a low voice. "Shut up, first adjust your internal injuries."

Chang Geng obediently closed his eyes.

Gu Yun stayed by him and kept watch for a while. When rummaging through the carriage, he wasn't able to find even a drop of wine. Having no choice, he took the medicine on the stove to drink, the scent of fresh ginger emitting from it causing his head to ache.

He used to think that Chang Geng might be a little confused. It may have been influenced by the actions he did after drinking, giving birth to a few inappropriate ideas. He soon assumed this child was very smart and keen, he would come to understand with only a few pointers. Who would have expected, he had only slightly touched, yet before he could even 'point', Chang Geng had already exploded first!

How could this be?

Gu Yun looked gloomily at Chang Geng who had closed his eyes and was adjusting his breathing, his head in a complete loss, sitting sadly on the side.

There was an ancient saying - 'cultivating one's moral character, managing one's household, peace to the land under heaven'. Gu Yun did not know whether it was because he did not cultivate himself properly or what, but both family and country were all in a mess, exhausting him to death.

It only took a few steps from the palace to arrive at the manor, even if the carriage was being pulled by a tortoise, they would still arrive in an instant.

When Gu Yun stepped out, a wooden bird flew towards him and directly landed on his shoulder, tilting its head and stared at him.

Suddenly, Gu Yun felt an extended hand behind him, he did not know when had Chang Geng quietly got out of the carriage, taking the bird away.

His face appeared just as terrible as before, but its usual calmness had been restored.

Chang Geng held the wooden bird, not rushing to open to see whose letter it was from. While the old butler took the carriage away,

he walked over to Gu Yun's side, whispering: "If yifu feels uncomfortable, I can move out, I will not hang around in front of you to be an eyesore, and I will never act out of line again in the future."

The bloodish hue in his eyes had all vanished, his lids drooping, his expression appeared cold, revealing a kind of thoughtfulness when one's heart had turned into cold ash.

Gu Yun stood dumbly for a moment, found that there was truly nothing he could say or do, then turned and left without a word.

Only from early this morning did Ge Chen and Cao Chun Hua knew something had gone wrong the night before. They had soon waited at the door for a long time, right now as they rushed to meet them, yet Gu Yun was completely silent, moving past them with a grave expression.

Chang Geng watched his back, a slight trace of blood still remained on the corner of his lips, appearing even more exhausted than Gu Yun who have been kneeling all night.

Ge Chen: "Big brother, what happened?"

Chang Geng shook his head. Only after Gu Yun's figure had completely disappeared that he retracted his gaze and reached out to lift the wooden bird's lower abdomen, taking out a piece of paper from the middle.

The note read: *"At the beginning of the new Emperor's accession, when Marshal Gu escorted the Northern Barbarian Prince, he had fallen seriously ill. The second brother of our family had traveled from Taiyuan for his treatment and did not return until a month later."*

Signed with one word *'Chen'*.

There was no telling how long the wooden bird had been flying for, its two wings showed signs of being worn down.

Chen Qing Xu's words did not have a proper start or finish, a different person perhaps would not be able to understand. As a cautious measure, Chang Geng tapped the back of the wooden bird, its peak opened up, shooting out a small flame. In the blink of an eye,

the paper was burned completely.

Cao Chun Hua carefully asked: "Big brother, recently I saw many wooden birds frequently flying in and out of the manor. Are you checking something?"

"Investigating an old case." Chang Geng said, "I have always thought that although yifu's character was the same as before he arrived in the northwest, yet his views on many things seemed to have changed a lot. I originally assumed it was the result of subtle influence while at the Silk Road, but it seems like that was not the case at all."

Ge Chen and Cao Chun Hua looked at each other.

Chang Geng briefly recovered from the feeling of loss just now, muttering to himself: "What had happened on the road to the Northern Frontier?"

What could have happened to cause someone who would treat a fallen sky as a blanket such as Gu Yun to fall ill and become bedridden while marching out, even frightening the entire Chen family at Taiyuan?

Chang Geng suddenly said: "Xiao Cao, A Chen, can you both help running a trip for me?"

After Cao Chun Hua secretly departed, Chang Geng began to live the days of a mysterious dragon - appearing at one moment, vanishing in the next.

On this side, Gu Yun had been made restless by concern. He had intended to choose one day to talk it through with Chang Geng, but he discovered that he simply could not find the other! Chang Geng was avoiding him.

With nothing to do from day until night, his mind was running full of thoughts. He even abandoned his medicine, having blinded eyes and deaf ears could be quite peaceful.

But at the same time, the court was submerged in raging waves and wind.

First, Emperor Long An wished to bring back the 'Rong Jin Law'. This was just announced, the Ministry of Revenue and Ministry of Works had both joined together to immediately bring forth their opposition, even the Ministry of War whom the Emperor had thoroughly reformed into being his own cotton coat showed disagreement.

Li Feng had sealed his mouth shut, stubbornly insisting on carrying things out his way. Not long after, he made his response.

On February 2nd, the head of the Ministry of Revenue was first accused by the imperial censor of 'receiving bribes from other countries for personal gain'. Later, during the thorough investigation, a series of bribery between various officials were quickly turned over, quickly escalating into the biggest corruption and fraud case under the Long An regency.

The head of the Ministry of Works was quite similar to the Imperial Uncle - although he had the heart that went out for the country and the people, yet he had no courage, immediately fleeing at the sight of smoke. After seeing the Emperor's attitude, he had instantly understood the situation, shut his mouth and hide away. Afterward, he no longer dared to mention the sensitive matter of the Rong Jin law.

On February 10th, Gu Yun had been under house arrest for a half-month in the manor, a Black Eagle quietly arrived outside the capital from the Northern Camp, replacing his armor with commoner attires and blended in during the night, mysteriously sneaking inside the manor.

Gu Yun finally had the opportunity to see Chang Geng who had been avoiding him as if avoiding snakes.

Chang Geng took the medicine soup in front of Gu Yun, the atmosphere between them was cold to the point of embarrassment: "There is a Black Eagle coming."

Gu Yun nodded, then picked up the medicine bowl up to drink. Chang Geng had already prepared the silver needles. When he saw him putting down the bowl, he brought the needles up and signaled with his eyes: *Is it alright?*

He was so polite, so distant, Gu Yun was even at a further loss for what to do.

Chang Geng no longer let Gu Yun casually lie on his lap. He resembled an unfamiliar doctor, only used gestures, or lightly holding on, he even refused to touch Gu Yun.

Gu Yun closed his eyes, letting the effect of the drug begin to kick in, his hearing gradually recovered, and everything in his surrounding immediately became noisy; the sounds of servants outside having a conversation while sweeping the snow, the sounds of the house guards' weapons and armors colliding, even the rustling of clothing when Chang Geng moved, all were drilling into his ears. Gu Yun had been deaf for more than ten days, momentarily unable to adjust.

Gu Yun resisted his irritability and seized this opportunity to ask: "Chang Geng, can you tell me why?"

Chang Geng certainly knew what it was he referred to, momentarily not speaking up.

Gu Yun: "Is it because... I have had too much that day, I did something to you... um..."

Chang Geng's hand trembled, and the needle that was about to be pinned down stopped in the air for a moment.

He had been continuously silent, there was no need to discuss how uncomfortable Gu Yun was feeling inside - even if he were to receive more anger from Li Feng, he could still have a clear conscience, looking directly at the heaven and earth and face himself, but with Chang Geng, although Gu Yun was unable to figure out anything, he could always feel this was the fault of both parties.

If he did not have any inappropriate behavior, how can Chang

Geng be...

"No." Chang Geng suddenly replied, his tone incredibly calm: "It was actually I who had done disrespectful things to yifu first."

Gu Yun: "..."

"And there is no reason," Chang Geng gently pressed his head, not letting him move, and the tone was unusually ordinary.

"What reason could there be for this kind of thing? If thinking about it, perhaps because I have never been loved by neither my father or mother, except for yifu, no one had ever given me affection. As the years went by, it had given birth to thoughts that I should not be having. You have never noticed it, and I had never intended to mention it to anyone either, on that day I was too furious and accidentally exposed myself."

Gu Yun could only feel as if a large stone had fallen from the sky, crushing his chest, causing him to be unable to breathe - he soon assumed Chang Geng only momentarily strayed from his path, who would have thought it was in truth a long time illness!

"There is no need for yifu to take this to heart, just pretend this matter had never existed." Chang Geng replied with indifference.

The needles in his hands never faltered. If it was not for him personally admitting to it, Gu Yun would perhaps continue assuming he was old yet improper, overestimated himself and having such insolent thoughts.

But how would he able to pretend it never happened?

Gu Yun felt he was about to go crazy, the feeling of premature aging was arising, for the first time, he discovered that the 'Northwest Flower' was no longer youthful - he could no longer understand what young people were thinking!

"The Emperor called me to into the court to listen in these past two days," Chang Geng abruptly changed the topic, "They are quarreling all day, opening a large case of corruption and fraud, I have also had a general idea of how the Emperor thinks. What does

yifu plan to do?"

Gu Yun gave him a blank stare, clearly not in the mood to discuss the political affairs with him.

Chang Geng sighed softly, reached out and took Gu Yun's Liuli glass off and placed it on the side. By this action, he had isolated himself from Gu Yun's line of sight, his expression firmly conveyed: *"I will not tell you anything."*

"I am willing to do anything for you. If you are uncomfortable with me, I can get out of your sight. If you only want a filial and understanding son, I promise I will never cross this line." Chang Geng said, "Yifu, I have been very embarrassed about this matter -- please stop asking what is in my heart, okay?"

A large *'no'* was written all over Gu Yun.

Chang Geng began to unload the silver needle on his body and calmly asked: "Then what do you want me to do?"

Not waiting for him to speak up, he had cut in again: "Anything."

If Chang Geng truly had disrespectful behaviors, clinging on to bother him, perhaps Gu Yun had already called three hundred house guards to kick him off to the already completed *Yanbei Wang* Manor.

Then using a sharp blade to cut through entangling strings - will himself to regard him coldly for a year and a half, everything would be over.

But Chang Geng gave him an 'even if you were to send me off to the ends of the earth, I would still happily comply'.

Gu Yun's head hurt immensely, feeling himself resemble a dog biting onto a tortoise's shell, there was no place for him to sink his teeth into.

After a long while, Gu Yun asked: "Is your injury better?"

Chang Geng nodded, making a *'hm'* sound in response, saving his words like saving gold.

Gu Yun: "How did it happen?"

Chang Geng said calmly: "After many years of delusions, momentarily succumbed to madness."

Gu Yun: "..."

All the more troubling.

Chang Geng carefully packed away the silver needles, turned to the corner of the room, taking a small bit of tranquilizer out to burn: "I'm going to call the Black Eagle brother in, alright?"

"Your Royal Highness," Gu Yun suddenly called him, his expression incredibly serious. "You are the descendant of prestigious royalty, there is no telling how much more precious your title could be in the future. Others all regard you like treasures, like gems, your subject also hopes that whenever and wherever you are, Your Highness will always cherish yourself, do not undervalue yourself nor your status."

Half of Chang Geng's face was hidden in the shadow, unwavering even in the face of eight winds flowing, he calmly replies: "Yes, the Marquis, rest assured."

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng stood for a while as if waiting for any other instructions he could have, but after a moment, he could only see Gu Yun staying in one place, speechless, only then did he turn away to leave quietly.

Gu Yun leaned back and took a deep breath.

He would rather Chang Geng to strongly argue with him much like in his teenage years, perhaps that would have been easier to deal with, because Gu Yun just now realized - as long as this bastard no longer desired anything, he seemed to had become invincible.

Gu Yun, who had been thoroughly 'defeated', walking back and forth in the room for a few laps, decided that he will never again dream of 'tender fragrance*' or 'red sleeves*' and the likes, he has had

enough.

**refers to the soft and fragrance body of a woman*

**refers to a well-dressed woman*

At this time, the Black Eagle who had been waiting for a long while knocked on the door and entered.

The Black Eagle probably had hurriedly flown straight here, although he had bathed and brushed his hair, his exhaustion still remained, even his beard hadn't been shaved.

He knelt down on the floor: "Grand Marshal."

"Cut the needless courtesy," Gu Yun regained his energy. "What happened? He Rong Hui sent you here?"

Black Eagle: "Yes!"

Gu Yun: "Let me see the letter."

He unfolded the letter given by the soldier, swiftly read through it. The handwriting of the Eagle faction's commander He Rong Hui was incredibly hideous, conveying everything in a short and brief manner.

At the end of the month, two small countries at the Western Regions - Ku Cha and Qie Mo have had some dispute regarding the matter of border trade, but the affairs between the countries of the Western Regions were to be resolved within themselves, it was not convenient for officers of Great Liang to intervene, thus they did not pay much attention to this at first.

Lou Lan and these two countries just happened to create a triangle. The King of Lou Lan had sent his brother as an envoy, serving as a connection to help the two sides reconcile, but their group had met their demise at the border of Ku Cha, the entire troop was wiped out.

At first, it was assumed to be desert bandits. But afterward as the King of Lou Lan made a thorough investigation, they had discovered

the emblem belonging to the sword of the imperial guards of the Ku Cha Kingdom among the ruins of the aftermath, thus they had promptly gone to question this country.

Ku Cha kingdom denied everything through and through, claiming that Lou Lan was showing favoritism towards Qie Mo, even humiliating Lou Lan's envoys. The King of Lou Lan sent their prince as the head, leading three thousand riders to Ku Cha, pressing them to shed light on this matter.

In the beginning, Ku Cha had kept their doors closed and refused to respond, then suddenly opened the gates, with hundreds of 'Sand Tigers' inside.

The so-called 'Sand Tiger' was a war chariot that ran in the desert, extremely heavy and consumed a great amount of *Ziliujin*. Their working mechanism was also extremely complicated.

Gu Yun had clashed with them when fighting the rebellion in the Western Region a decade ago. At that time, there were only three large sand tigers on the opponent's side, yet they had almost managed to trap half of his still inexperienced Black Cavalry, but as far as he knew, those three Sand Tigers were the result of all the Western Region countries pouring their resources together to create.

Gu Yun stood up abruptly, his brows in a deep scowl, his fingers unconsciously spinning the wooden beads in his hands- this was too similar to the case of the Southwest rebellion. He lowered his voice and asked: "Is it truly a sand tiger, not just an empty shell?"

The Black Eagle was quick in his reply: "Marshal, it was indeed the real sand tiger. In a very short amount of time, Lou Lan riders had already been utterly defeated. Their prince almost perished on the battlefield, his soldiers have risked death in order to rescue him.

"On the same day, Lou Lan had sent people to our garrison to ask for help, but the seal on the letter had not even been removed, many soldiers of other nations on the Silk Road have already received this news, all were instantly in a state of fear. Other countries in the Western Region, Tianzhu, and the foreigners all gathered their troops in their respective places. The Northwest Governor Master Meng

personally went to the camp, telling us to wait for the 'Drumming Order'."

Gu Yun slapped the table: "Ridiculous!"

The soldier thought that he was referring to the Drumming Order, he responded: "The commander of our Black Eagle faction is also saying this. The Black Iron Camp was not supposed to follow the command of the Drumming Order, but Governor Meng had said that Marshal was under house arrest and to reflect on your actions behind closed doors, thus he had ordered us to wait for the imperial decree..."

Chapter 52: Boundless

—

Gu Yun casually took up the remaining half of the wine bottle, testing the temperature, then sipped a mouthful: "Little brat, do you think I cannot deal with you?"

—

Gu Yun's heart tightened, everything happened faster than he imagined, even countless times more chaotic than he imagined.

The Western Region was much like a shallow pit with many frogs - small countries resembling a mass of a goat's feces, one pile to the east, one pile to the west, quarreling every few days, wanting to dominate one another. However, in the past few years, with the Black Iron Camp keeping watch at the entrance of the Silk Road, for a long time, no one would dare to stir up any trouble.

Ku Cha was the size of a mosquito's eye, even if they were to sell all their iron, they would never be able to purchase over a hundred Sand Tigers. Behind this unusual action, of course, would be wolves preying, this was as clear as day.

The question was - what was the intention of the forces standing behind Ku Cha Kingdom?

Gu Yun did not believe that this was done by *that person* in the palace. Li Feng had a strong desire to control, he very much liked to carry things out in a safe and certain manner. He never would have done such rash action in such a short period of time, under a situation in which even he himself hadn't had everything planned carefully.

He was afraid that this time, even Li Feng had also been caught off guard. On one hand, he did not know what the exact situation was in the northwest. On the other hand, he was afraid that the Black Iron Camp would act without command, disrupting the arrangement of the court. *'The marshal seal was currently being confiscated, no*

Drumming Order will be granted' had become his excuse to hold them back.

Gu Yun asked: "How many soldiers are there in each defensive garrison of the other countries?"

Black Eagle: "In the station of the Westerners, there are about three thousand. Tian Zhu was a bit further away, there are only one thousand troops, the rest belonged to other Western Region countries."

"Impossible." Gu Yun slightly bit his tongue, and swallowed the words *'investigate again'* back, only to remember that he was not in the army at this time.

He had been trapped in this city the size of a well, completely beyond reach.

"Since hundreds of Sand Tigers have appeared, the other side must want an all-out battle. If they don't have a few tens of thousands of elite soldiers standing at the back, all the *Ziliujin* pouring into these machines will be in vain, even if there are not many in daylight, it does not mean that there are no troops hidden in the dark." Gu Yun narrowed his eyes, his fingers slightly tapped the table:

"To deal with Lou Lan's poor-man cavalry, a team of Heavy Armors would be more than enough to suffice. They gathered a large number of Sand Tigers and tens of thousands of troops at our border, this cannot be about a trivial argument between the small countries in the Western Region."

The soldier was puzzled: "Then...then your subordinate will immediately rush back now..."

Gu Yun intercepted him: "There is no need, and it's already too late."

The Black Eagle rushed to the capital from the station at the Silk Road, taking two days at best, this was already a godlike speed. The capital forbid air travel, he could only land in the Northern Camp. Even if he were to enter the capital on the same night, when arriving

in front of Gu Yun, it was already the third day. If he were to return to send the message, counting both departing and returning time, even if he ran to death, it would still take up to five or six days.

The battlefield changed rapidly, five or six days were enough for them to lose their country -

Gu Yun clenched his teeth, why must he be detained here in the capital right at this moment!

"You go rest first." Gu Yun whispered, "Let me think about it."

The Black Eagle soldier did not dare to be talkative, obediently taking his leave.

Gu Yun turned to heat up for himself a bottle of wine, strolling back and forth in his room. Within this small space, his head had completely cooled down, gradually finding a clue, he thought: *"Perhaps the worst hasn't happened."*

He was detained, Shen Yi was not here. At this moment, the northwestern Black Iron Camp was being led by He Rong Hui - the commander of the Black Eagle faction.

He Rong Hui's character, Gu Yun understood it full well - the man was notorious for being the topmost difficult person to deal with. In addition to Gu Yun, even Shen Yi might not be able to withstand him, he will definitely not put the Northwestern Governor in his eyes. If that Meng Peng Fei dared to bare his might inside their camp under the name of the Drumming Order, He Rong Hui would probably take the lead in opposing, if not careful... perhaps he would even take care of Governor Meng.

Then what would be the next step?

Suddenly, the door was knocked from the outside, Gu Yun went to open it and found that Chang Geng was standing there.

Gu Yun's hand was holding onto the door. As soon as he caught sight of Chang Geng, the heart that had just calmed down began to stir up again, his stomach twisted in a knot: "How come you are here again?"

Chang Geng: "I think yifu perhaps could use me right now."

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng stood at the door and asked, "Can I come in?"

After requesting for his permission, he turned sideways, in a 'completely ready to go' stance, as long as Gu Yun told him to 'get away', he would immediately obey and vanish into thin air.

Gu Yun thought: *"I must have owed a lot of money to this little bastard in my previous life."*

Then, he could not do anything other than to make way for said little bastard to enter the room.

Just now, Gu Yun was deeply immersed in his thoughts, accidentally leaving the bottle of wine to reach a boiling state on the stove. The scent of liquor spread in the room. Gu Yun tried to make conversation, lifting up the bottle and asked Chang Geng: "Do you want a drink?"

Chang Geng did not pay him any mind, bringing out for himself a bottle of already cooled boiled water, sitting properly next to a chessboard - if he were to shave his hair, this image of him would very much resemble a mysterious monk, beyond the mortal realm.

Chang Geng asked: "The Black Eagle will not run all the way from the Northwestern Camp in the night without any reason. Is there a change at the border?"

Gu Yun didn't quite want him to know, vaguely saying: "Just a little trouble, it's nothing."

His personal prestige in the military was extremely high. The advantage of it was that he did not speak twice, his abilities to control and his efficiency were both excellent. However, with everything that was too extreme bearing the tendency to become counter-productive, this also had its downside. For example, as Gu Yun would involuntarily maintain this prestige, when faced with certain things even he himself could not figure out, he would not take the initiative to talk to others about it either.

Over time, it was easy to become stubborn.

Chang Geng lifted his eyes and looked at him, but quickly retracted his gaze, reverting back to avoid his line of sight, for he was afraid he would sink into them if he were to look too long. He picked up a chess piece from the box next to him, playing with it at his fingertips. The piece was black and green, a hint of light flashed as the steam lamp shone upon it.

Seeing that Gu Yun wasn't willing to elaborate on it, Chang Geng continued his question: "The generals of the three major factions can perfectly handle things on their own, with a bit of friction at the border, they would not come to bother you - my guess is there are at least tens of thousands of unusual troops assembled or a different problem which was equally grave, otherwise, that Black Eagle brother would not have to travel as such."

Gu Yun repeatedly turned the steaming hot cup of wine in his hand, slightly narrowing his eyes in the aroma of liquor: "Old General Zhong has taught you a lot."

"There are still things General Zhong has never taught me," Chang Geng said. "What is yifu thinking?"

"The Black Iron Camp forever put defending the homeland as our final boundary."

Gu Yun explained. "In case of sudden incidents with unclear circumstances happening, Old He will automatically regard the border as a front line and close off the entrance of the Silk Road. All roads are cut off, and those who deliberately enter will be executed. If a friendly neighboring country came to seek assistance when the Marshal is not there, the Black Iron Camp will only provide protection at most, they will never leave the job to mobilize troops."

"Five thousand soldiers of the Black Iron Camp, unless they were gods themselves that arrived, otherwise, whoever might come, they will never be able to easily break through the barrier of our Northwestern Frontier - I am not worried about this for the time being, just thinking about what action they will take next."

His voice was low and gentle, and seemed to be even deeper than the aroma of liquor hanging in the room. Chang Geng's ears couldn't help but tingle, he kept his head down, trying to ward off distracting thoughts: "If it were to be me, I would not choose this moment to act against Great Liang."

Gu Yun's gaze paused on the black chess piece in between his contrasting white fingertips: "Why?"

Chang Geng placed it on the chessboard, a clear sound rang out.

"Because it's still not enough," he said, "The contradiction between yifu and His Majesty has not reached the point resembling fire and water. Although he temporarily put you under house arrest in the capital, the Black Iron Camp still hasn't scattered, still remaining to be a solid piece of metal. In case of foreign enemies invading, the Emperor will put you back in action at any time. The conflict between the regime and the military power that has intensified in the past few years will be resolved overnight, all they have laid out for years will be destroyed."

Since the incident on the carriage that day, Chang Geng had suddenly sharpened up in front of Gu Yun. Whether it be family affairs or politics, when coming from his mouth, they all directly hit the bull's-eye with no mercy.

Gu Yun was stabbed by the words *'the contradiction between political power and military power'*, the fingers that had turned red by the hot wine cup was stopped in the air.

This was a scrape hidden deep under the peaceful facade of Great Liang.

Emperor Wu had no son, there was no other option but to adopt a child within their bloodline then pass on the title of the Crown Prince. No matter how much people praised the man for his intellect, in the end, he was only human. At his final moment, the old man had had his own selfish wish, leaving the military power that could threaten the Emperor and command the magistrates to his most beloved daughter, thus separated military power from the court's regime.

This perhaps had become the biggest failure of Emperor Wu in his lifetime. If the Marshal was understanding and content with his position, the Emperor had a vast heart, the ruler and the subject could then live in harmony for one generation, but what about two generations? Three generations?

Inside, Gu Yun was fully aware of this matter -

One day, the contradiction between the Black Tiger Emblem and the Emperor's Seal would no longer be able to reconcile. In the end, there could be only two outcomes: 'the incompetent ruler abdicated' or 'set aside the bow as there are no more birds'.

"I think this is a 'two in one' test." Chang Geng placed several pieces on the board. "If those foreigners discover that once yifu is out of the camp, the Black Iron Camp would immediately become a mass of straw being commanded by the Drumming Order, then the massive troops resembling tigers preying in their hands were prepared for us.

"Not only the Western Region, but also the barbarians in the North and the Eastern Sea who had been silent for many years. But this possibility is very small, the most likely outcome was that the northwest will remain impenetrable, General He will imprison Governor Meng currently holding the Drumming Order..."

Gu Yun's gaze on him was finally dyed with a hint of shock.

Chang Geng greeted his eyes with a half-bitter, half-sorrowful smile: "Yifu, don't be so surprised, all things related to you, even turning over all of Great Liang, there isn't a second person who could be as thorough as I am."

Gu Yun: "..."

This kind of young man who was immune to both hard and soft tactics, especially troublesome, was truly difficult to deal with; could not scold, could not beat, could not persuade nor coax, but after a moment of being choked up, Gu Yun suddenly had an idea, decisively playing his 'utterly mindless, incredibly thick-skinned' move, tilting his head and asking with a serious look: "What? Are you teasing your yifu?"

Chang Geng was caught off guard, as expected, getting hit by this one move. His large white sleeve knocked over a bowl of water on the table.

The ever-victorious Marshal Gu did not pay any mind to this little victory. He waved his hand with great grace: "Continue."

Chang Geng soon returned to his senses, although Gu Yun just scared him to death, at the same time, he felt relieved - even if the sky fell, that person can always remain lively.

"... If I were to be in their shoes, I will use Heavy Troops to continue to pressure the border of the Silk Road, especially Heavy Armors and Chariots," Chang Geng said "Continuously threaten the Black Iron Camp, appearing as if they will attack at any moment.

"Yifu is not in the army, General He will be at most a suspension bridge left hanging high, he definitely will not take the initiative to mobilize troops. On one hand, he will send you a letter, at the same time, he would seek assistance from the nearby areas. It could be the Defense Army, or it may be the garrison of the Central Plains."

Gu Yun raised his eyebrows.

"When the Black Iron Camp issued a request for help, it must be an emergency, no one will regard it as just an ordinary matter, although the Drumming Order has been passed from the Southern Frontier, but in just a few months, its prestige is not enough to command the entire country, thus the general in charge is very likely to jump over the Ministry of War and send out reinforcement."

Chang Geng stared at the mottled chessboard. "But if I remember correctly, when the North Barbarians attacked Yanhui Town back then, the Northern Frontier City Defense Army had also been personally cleaned by yifu. You can say that you didn't deliberately place your men inside, but I am afraid that those who use the heart of a villain to measure a hero's action will not believe this.

"But the commander of the crucial Central Plains troops, Cai Feng - Old General Cai coincidentally used to be a subordinate of the Old Marquis. In this way, in the five major military regions of the

Great Liang, no need to mention the southwest, General Shen was your man. The Western Region had the Black Iron Camp, completely lawless, even daring to imprison the Northwest Governor; the Northern frontier and the Central Plains garrison ignored the Ministry of War's Drumming Order, as soon as the Black Iron Camp seek help, they would immediately send troops at will." Chang Geng grabbed a handful of chess pieces, thrown them altogether on the board, the scattering noise ringing out.

The rest was for certain -

Emperor Li Feng would probably realize more and more that Gu Yun's act of yielding to the Drumming Order was completely a 'scam'. He would then use himself to measure others - assuming half of his nation was already placed in the hands of Gu Yun.

The Emperor would be unable to breathe from rage.

Chang Geng's gaze were endlessly deep: "Would yifu listen to my ideas?"

Gu Yun: "Speak."

Chang Geng: "First, immediately send the Black Eagle to send a letter to General Cai, inform him he must not act arbitrarily without command. Even if General Cai decided to mobilize troops, he must first adjust the formation, preparing medicine and ration. If we were to send the message right now perhaps it will still be in time."

Gu Yun immediately questioned: "Why not send a letter to the Northern Frontier Defense Army?"

Chang Geng said, his expression unchanging: "Because yifu has only one Black Eagle, we can only place one bet in this gamble.

"In view of the fact that even someone like me could realize that the Northern Barbarian is very likely to siege this chaotic opportunity for their advantage, I'm certain General He would understand this also, thus there is a high chance he will skip the nearest solution to reach for the one further and seek the assistance of the Central Plains' garrison.

"After returning to the northwest, the Black Eagle must advice General He to not be impatient, there is no need for him to listen to the Drumming Order's command, but he definitely must not greatly offend the Northwest Governor."

Gu Yun: "Third?"

"Thirdly," Chang Geng said slowly. "I want to ask yifu to make use of this moment while the news on the Silk Road side hasn't reached the capital yet to find a reason to thoroughly hand over the Marshal Seal. Clearly express you will no longer get involved in military affairs, at the same time, thoroughly communicate with the Emperor, you only need to say that the security of the northwest is of great importance, before taking your leave, you have already explained everything to your subordinates - without the Marshal Seal, the three commanders of the three factions are not allowed to act rashly in any situation. The Northwest troops cannot lack its leader for even a day, requesting the Emperor to find someone to take over as soon as possible."

Taking a step back, avoiding the sharp edge while keeping He Rong Hui from committing an offense.

In fact, Chang Geng still wanted to say, *"This is not the best plan, it can only be used to treat the branch but not cure the root"*. However, his instinct told him Gu Yun might not want to hear these words, thus he had swallowed it back.

Gu Yun was silent for a long time after hearing this.

Suddenly, his thoughts ran far away, and he couldn't help but think of the child he had picked up from the wolf's mouth in the blizzard as white as feathers that year.

Back then, Shen Yi had lied to Chang Geng that it was only a coincidence. But in truth, it wasn't.

At that time, they already had their own men the Northern Frontier. After Gu Yun accepted the royal decree, he actually found Xiu Niang first. After discovering her connection with the Barbarians, he decided not to act in order to avoid affecting the grander scheme

of things.

Gu Yun was still young back then, his ways of handling things were more or less immature. Only setting his eyes at the barbarian, he had forgotten the former Emperor's command of quickly returning to the capital after finding the little Prince, carelessly letting Chang Geng run out the city gate. Only then did he hurriedly chase after him with Shen Yi in a state of panic.

Even as Gu Yun closed his eyes now, he could still see clearly the image of Chang Geng's appearance at that time - a small thing covered in injuries, scrawny and bare-boned, in the midst of snow and wolves, he had somehow miraculously held on until they arrived.

Gu Yun wrapped him in his outer coat, he was light enough to be carried with one arm. He could feel as if he was holding a small dying bird, for fear of suffocating him even with the slightest force.

Time flowed like water, as soon as he looked away for a moment, the boy had already grown so big.

Chang Geng saw that he was quiet for a long time without answering, he could not help but ask: "Yifu?"

Gu Yun slightly tilted his head, his expression under the lamplight almost appeared gentle for a brief moment. Chang Geng's heart skipped a beat.

Perhaps it was the blood that Chang Geng had vomited out when his anger was raging or due to the mess that happened in the next few days, in short, although Gu Yun felt that matter was ridiculous, helpless and troublesome at the same time, but contradicting to what he imagined, he did not become as furious as he expected.

Gu Yun: "I know, you should go rest early."

Chang Geng heard his order of sending him away, immediately standing up to leave.

Gu Yun: "...Wait."

He lowered his eyes and seemed to hesitate a little: "That time

you told me, you could do anything I wanted, is that right?"

Chang Geng's fingers that originally went to open the door hung in the air, curled up slightly.

Gu Yun: "I don't want you to go far, I don't want you to force yourself either. Yifu only wants you to be happy and well. "

Chang Geng stood dead for a moment, then fled without a word.

Gu Yun casually took up the remaining half of the wine bottle, testing the temperature, then sipped a mouthful: *"Little brat, do you think I cannot deal with you?"*

Chapter 53: Alleviate

—

Gu Yun truly understood it well: when it came to certain things, the more evasive one was, the more taboo it seemed, the more intoxicating it would be. He simply and generously let him see everything to his heart's content — there was really nothing good to see anyway.

—

When Chang Geng arrived, his footsteps were steady, everything was in order, the whole world seemed to be in his hands. When leaving, he had turned into a paste in the shape of a human, not knowing which leg to step out from the door first.

In the dark night where warmth turned to coldness, the breath that passed in and out of his chest resembled a raging flame.

Chang Geng fled back to his yard in a panic, took a breath and leaned his forehead against the sword training puppet in the courtyard.

After many years have passed, this iron puppet was already out of commission and could no longer be used. It's just that Chang Geng was not willing to throw it away, thus he had let it stay in the yard as a decoration for hanging lanterns.

Its cold iron surface soon cooled down Chang Geng's burning flesh. He looked up at this big fellow, reminiscing old memories of his youth.

He remembered that he used to let it carry a basket packed with breakfast every day, then one boy and one puppet would eagerly run over to Gu Yun's quarters, listening to his endless speeches from North to South.

And when they prepared for Gu Yun's birthday, they had wrapped ridiculous ribbons and silks all over its body, then let it carry a bowl of noodle that didn't look appetizing at all to wish that

person a happy birthday...

Thinking about it, Chang Geng couldn't help but smile a little, all of his joyful and warm memories were all related to Gu Yun.

Chang Geng hung the lamp in his hand on the arm of the puppet, then affectionately patted the gear exposed on its back. Recalling Gu Yun's two sentences just now, he heaved a sigh, his eyes darkening.

He had assumed Gu Yun might be furious, or perhaps he would repeatedly persuade him. He did not expect for Gu Yun to show such attitude.

Gu Yun had clearly presented his opinion in a peaceful manner — *I am still your yifu, I still love you the most, no matter what you think inside, to me, everything will be just the same as before. I will forgive any of your offending, all of your words, I will not take it to heart. I can't accommodate your wishes that goes against the normal order, but I also believe that one day you will return to the right path.*

Chang Geng wrote 'no desire'* on his own body, and Gu Yun gave him an 'as solid as a stone, completely unmoving' in response.

**taken from the full phrase: only with no desire can one lift their head high*

"All of this mindfulness has been used on me." Chang Geng said with a bitter smile, "You should have saved a bit of personal wish in front of that person in the palace."

Chang Geng knew why Gu Yun suddenly did not continue his words, it was not at all because he was being a bother hence Gu Yun wanted him gone early — but because he had more or less guessed what his next words would be, euphemistically suggesting to him not to mention it.

At present, avoiding the edge was the lesser plan, the best step to take next was to rebel — using military power to control and replace the political power, and from then on, the military and political affairs would be able to unite as one.

If there was one branch of force that could send troops overseas

at any time, the laws regarding the sea route and the Silk Road would then be free to be modified at their best interest. At that time, Great Liang would be able to advance and retreat at will, and the prestige would run far and wide, they could then be tolerated enough to let go of the *Ziliujin* ban.

But it was a pity that under Gu Yun's improper skin, under the resolution to kill, hid the ever righteous and noble bones that could withstand any wind and storm — he would never be able to commit such acts of overthrowing the throne and stealing away the country.

Chang Geng slowly walked into his room. At this time, the familiar sound of bird wings came up in the air. Chang Geng reached out and caught the weathered wooden bird. He opened it to find a letter from Chen Qing Xu.

It was rare for her handwriting to be this disorderly and untidy, Chang Geng managed to make out what was written with much difficulty: *"I had discovered the source of the poison in the body of the Marshal. If I could find the secret recipe, an antidote can be created."*

Chang Geng's footsteps came to a halt.

However, his ecstasy had not even had the chance to rise when he saw Chen Qing Xu's following sentence: *"But his eyes and ears have been damaged for many years, he even attacks poison with poison, the effect had been accumulating for a long time. The poison can be cured, but depression is difficult to treat, Your Highness, please ready yourself."*

Another line following afterward, the handwriting was even messier: *"I suspect this is the secret unknown to outsiders of the barbarian goddess. Since the last goddess had entered the palace as an act of peace, it has been difficult to find more clues from outside the country. If convenient, you can try to look for one or two in the forbidden palace."*

Chang Geng read from the beginning to the end, then rolled the letter up and thoroughly burned it, his heart sinking.

The Marquis of Order had been on the battlefield for many generations, their contributions incredibly grand, the Marquis's manor is also a special gift from the monarch. When one looked up

from the small courtyard where Chang Geng lived, one could make out the magnificent golden curling roof of the palace under the moonlight. Chang Geng intentionally yet unintentionally glanced towards the direction of the palace. There seemed to be a surge of wind and thunder in his eyes.

Only flashing by for a brief moment, it instantly retracted back inside him, undetectable.

Early the next morning, Gu Yun truly did follow Chang Geng's advice, sending his written apology to the palace.

He first stated his own progress of reflecting on his action and sincerely acknowledged his mistake with the Emperor, then claimed that his old injury had recurred, afraid that it will be difficult to handle the responsibility, requested the Emperor to take back his Marshal Seal.

Sickness was a commonly seen excuse, but surprisingly, this request of the Marquis did not appear at all like an excuse — for he used his own *Kai* calligraphy style that had made quite a name for itself among the common folk to list all details for the transfer of military affairs — and finally, stating an absurd request of moving the location for his house arrest punishment to the suburbs of the capital.

The elegant words couldn't conceal the meaning between his words: *"I have already reflected on my actions, let me go out to play."*

This request carried the style of the Marquis of Order, dyed with a hint of arrogance and honesty, one could tell at a glance it was undoubtedly not the work of a counselor writing in his stead.

The Emperor of Long An held on to this request for one day, he did not open it to discussion, but did not approve of it either. On the next day, he sent the gift of many precious herbs to show his grace,

lifting the house arrest order — this could be regarded as acquiescence to Gu Yun's resignation. To express respect, He did not find someone to take over, only letting the Marshal Seal hang in the air. He then used warm words to appease, claiming that after the Marquis returned to the court after his recovery, the Marshal Seal will be returned to him.

On the afternoon of the same the day, Li Feng had somehow brought out a book he had read in his youth, a calligraphy note fell out from inside. Compared with the written request on his desk, the writing was slightly more juvenile, at certain places of letter transition, the lack of strength in the wrist seemed to be showing, but the potential soon to come in the future could already be seen.

Li Feng took the note to look at carefully, then suddenly asked Zhu Little Feet in a slightly amazed tone of voice: "Do you know who wrote this?"

Zhu Little Feet feigned confusion: "That is... this old servant don't understand whether this writing is good or bad, but since it is preserved by His Majesty, it must be from the hand of a famous artist?"

"Your mouth is so sweet — but it truly can be regarded as the work of a famous person. This was written by Uncle Shiliu." Li Feng gently put the note on the table, flattening it with a paperweight. He seemed to reminisce about the past, his eyes gazing far away:

"When I was young, I did not practice writing diligently and was scolded by Royal Father. When Uncle knew about this, he had stayed up all night, the next day, he brought to me a stack of sample calligraphy notes..."

At that time, Gu Yun's eyes were already not good, they became even worse at night, unable to see a thing. He could only wear liuli glass. After a night of hard work, his eyes had turned red, showing a pair of rabbit eyes the next day, even trying to display the look of complete seriousness in front of them.

Li Feng continued on, recalling the old days, his tone dyed with nostalgia, muttering to himself: "Say, Uncle was so introverted in his

childhood, did not like to be close to people at all. It truly is a far cry from the present — ah yes, where is he now?"

Zhu Little Feet replied: "I heard that he had gone to the hot springs in the north to recuperate."

Li Feng couldn't help but laugh: "He really went out to play? Forget it... Jiangnan Spring Tea has just been sent here, go ask someone to give him some. When he returns, tell him to write me a sign for my palace at the north."

Zhu Little Feet promptly responded, no need to mention it any further — he felt that this was already enough.

In the afternoon of the same day, the northwestern guardian station sent an 800-miles expedited letter, stating that there were unusual changes at the border, the Black Iron Camp refused to listen to the Drumming Order, and detained Governor Meng, so on and so forth.

Emperor Long An was recalling the old days. He picked up the matter then gently placed it down. He only sent people to scold He Rong Hui for ignoring the laws, cutting a bit of salary as punishment just for the sake of it, instructing the Black Iron Camp to continue strictly guard the border.

It's not easy for Chang Geng to find the right time to go to the hot springs in the northern suburbs to fill Gu Yun in on what followed, only to see that Gu was wrapped in a bathrobe, two feet soaked in the hot spring, a cup in hand, and two beautiful waitresses on the side massaging his shoulders, as blissful as living in heaven.

Gu Yun used the excuse of leaving to recuperate, and staying true to his words, he was wholeheartedly 'recuperating'.

This half-deaf wasn't able to hear anyone coming in, tilting his

head to whisper something to the young miss next to him. There was no telling what he had said, the waitress did not speak up, only laughed, her face blushing bright red.

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun saw that the waitress' blushing face was very adorable, almost wanting to raise his hand to touch. The hand just lifted up halfway through. He then saw the two girls quickly paying courtesy to someone, and then automatically retreated.

Gu Yun wasn't able to see who had arrived when he turned back, searching around for his liuli glass and placing it on the bridge of the nose.

As he saw Chang Geng, this old but not proper character did not feel embarrassed at all, even happily calling him over, climbing up lazily: "I haven't been able to rest for a long time, all my bones went crisp from lying."

Chang Geng: "...Perhaps it wasn't crisp only from lying?"

As the words left his mouth, he instantly felt regret.

"Huh?" Gu Yun did not seem to hear it, asking with a perplexed face, "What?"

Somehow, Chang Geng remembered that this person always could not hear what he did not want to hear when he and Shen Yi were disguised as hermits living in the town of Yanhui.

He was already originally an expert in playing dumb*. Once pretending not to hear, he was even more powerful, like a tiger with wings.

** 'pretending garlic' (装蒜) is an idiom used for playing dumb/making a pretense*

The Marquis of Order — Great Liang's number one garlic asked him cheerfully: "Right, did you bring my medicine? In the evening, I will take you to Xue Mei Zhai at the back. There are a few new songstresses that had just arrived. It is said that they will all be

competing for the number one spot at Qi Yuan tower at the end of the year, let us go check them out in advance."

Chang Geng thought that as Gu Yun had said to take his medicine with him, there must be a matter of urgency. As it turned out, it was because deaf ears were no good for enjoying flower wine*, he instantly let out an unamused smile: "The medicine contains three parts poison, when there is nothing of urgency, yifu should drink less."

**drinking wine with the company of a prostitute.*

Gu Yun gave him a completely irrelevant answer: "Mm, good, it's good that you brought it, the water here is very nice, come have a soak to unwind."

Chang Geng: "..."

He no longer wanted to reason with him. "The Emperor already received the Northwest Line's report. Everything is secure, you can rest assured."

Gu Yun nodded slowly: "Mm — you already came here, you're not going to soak for a while with me?"

"...No," Chang Geng said, expression ice cold. "Yifu, enjoy it yourself."

Gu Yun clucked his tongue in disappointment, then without shying away from Chang Geng at all, feeling that there was nothing to shy away from, he calmly undressed and went directly into the water.

Chang Geng was caught off guard and quickly averted his sight. There was no place to placed his eyes upon, he grabbed a cup of wine, taking a sip as if to conceal something. Only after his lips touched it did he remember — this was Gu Yun's cup!

He stood up awkwardly and almost knocked down the small table. He said dryly: "I only came to inform yifu, it's good that you know, I... I have some things to take care of, I will take my leave first."

"Xiao Chang Geng." Gu Yun called him, putting aside the liuli glass that had already been fogged by the hot steam, his line of sight was slightly out of focus, yet he still appeared like a dragon king commanding water, leaning on the edge, he carelessly said, "We are both men, I have what you have, what you don't have I don't have either, there's nothing new."

Chang Geng held his breath and finally lifted his gaze. Gu Yun's figure was a little indistinct, but the scars were shockingly striking. One of them crossed his chest under his neck, making his upper body almost seemed like he had been split in two then sewed back together again.

Gu Yun truly understood it well: when it came to certain things, the more evasive one was, the more taboo it seemed, the more intoxicating it would be. He simply and generously let him see everything to his heart's content — there was really nothing good to see anyway.

"Everyone bears deep feelings for their parents, not only you, but also me," Gu Yun said.

"My father is a living animal. He only ever knew how to gather a group of iron puppets to chase me down. The first person who holds my hand, teaching me to write was the former Emperor. The first person who coaxed me to take medicine and give me candied fruit afterward was also the former Emperor.

"When I was young, I also felt he was the only one who had ever loved me. Sometimes when this kind of feeling became too deep, it may gave birth to some illusion. But after this period passed by, it will be alright, the more you let it weigh in your heart, the more overwhelmed you will feel, the more it will entangle you."

Chang Geng opened his mouth, but Gu Yun used the cover of being deaf to ignore anything he might say and continued on: "Yifu knows that you are a good boy, but too easy to burden yourself. Let go of it all, stay with me here for two days. Living like an old monk all day, what good will it do? There are so much beautiful scenery, countless of interesting things to be experienced, don't be so stubborn."

Chapter 54: Shock

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At this time, a much larger storm was approaching the brightly lit capital with no warning.

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Chang Geng stood stiff for a long time, then, he stepped forward to the edge of the hot spring, slowly knelt down, carefully looking at the mass of scars and wounds on Gu Yun's body.

Over the years, he had become accustomed to being awakened by the Bone of Impurity in the middle of the night, and every time, he would always think about Gu Yun.

Chang Geng had favored peacefulness since he was a child. At that time, he often felt that this overly lively yifu was impossible to be reasoned with. Later, after he pondered more and more, he suddenly had a strange question: *Gu Yun...how could he grow into such a person?*

Thinking about it, he himself was the only son of the Old Marquis and the First Princess, he should have been the most arrogant noble of all, how precious and prestigious his status could be.

He suddenly lost his sight and hearing when he was a small child, he was forced by his father's whip to run forward. The wings that had not been fully grown had been tattered by injuries, and he even had to endure the loss of his mother and father. The Black Iron Camp's glory from the past now turned incredibly bleak, being trapped deep inside the forbidden palace... if a person suffered too much damage at a young age, even if one did not turn out to be cold and negative, at least they would not become so playful.

When it came to this matter, Chang Geng had personally experienced it himself.

Sometimes, it was difficult for him to imagine: how many layers of wounds should overlap in order to hone a person like this?

Chang Geng suddenly felt incredibly hateful — why must he be born ten years too late, not having the opportunity to hold tightly the small childish hand of this person in the midst of thorns from all sides? For this reason alone, he felt that he would be jealous of Shen Yi for all his life.

As if the devil has blinded his eyes, he moved forward, swept aside Gu Yun's long wet hair scattered all over, carefully and hesitantly touching the scar cutting across his chest.

"Ouch..." Gu Yun felt his scalp tingling at his touch, quickly moved to hide away: "I'm trying to talk reason with you, how come you started to get touchy with your hands?"

Chang Geng asked, his voice hoarse: "How did you get this?"

This deaf man wasn’t able to hear it at the beginning. Chang Geng caught his hand and wrote it again in his palm.

Gu Yun was taken aback, momentarily unable to remember.

Chang Geng wiped away the fog on his liuli glass and returned it to Gu Yun's nose. He stared at him deep in the eyes and said through sign language: "Yifu, can we each confess one thing honestly to one another?"

Gu Yun frowned.

Chang Geng: "You have deep feelings for the former Emperor. Do you want to kiss him, hold him, and intimately entangle with him for a lifetime?"

Gu Yun was shocked: "What?"

He couldn't help but recall the old withered face of the former Emperor always cast in layers of sorrow, and felt goosebumps arising all over.

"Alright, you already answered, my turn." Chang Geng then said

with a pure-hearted expression, "I want to."

Gu Yun: "..."

It took him a while to understand the meaning of Chang Geng's 'I want to'. The first wave of goosebumps had not even subsided, yet the next wave already arose, his hairs standing up all at once resembling a hedgehog.

"There is not a single moment where I do not want to, even in my dreams, especially right now...there are several other things I want, and I am afraid that they will only dirty yifu's ears, I will not mention them." Chang Geng closed his eyes, no longer looking at Gu Yun, continuing to sign: "If I did not sink so deep, how would I be worthy of the words 'succumb to madness?'"

Gu Yun was speechless for a long time, only managing to respond after a while, his voice dry: "...you should go read more scripture with the monks."

Chang Geng: "It would be great if you have said these words to me five years ago, perhaps I will be able to let go and what happened today would not have happened."

However, so many days and nights have passed, so many nightmares and mud that could only be withstood by reciting Gu Yun's name. Repeatedly, he had been drinking poison to quench his thirst –

It's already too late.

The Marquis of Order who was a slowpoke and was always a half-beat behind still hasn't come back to his senses, shockingly thinking to himself inside: *"I still assumed you were only a little brat whose mouth still reeks of milk!"*

"Then for my next question," Chang Geng closed his eyes tightly. "Does yifu think I am disgusting?"

Gu Yun was silent for a long time. Chang Geng's eyelashes trembled fiercely, both his hands involuntarily tightened together

inside his sleeves — Gu Yun's physical reaction just now was unmistakable, the obvious discomfort had shown clearly in the goosebumps on his skin.

Gu Yun might understand his heart, but perhaps he would never understand his desires.

Chang Geng heard the sound of the water. Gu Yun had come up to the shore and put on his clothes.

Gu Yun sighed, reached out and patted Chang Geng's shoulder, calmly replying in avoidance: "You know that is impossible."

Chang Geng's lips slightly curled up, maybe it was intended to show a lighthearted smile, but he completely failed, he could only reply in a whisper: "I know, I will not make it difficult for yifu."

Gu Yun sat down beside him, and for a while, he felt that he was a little slower and was about to speak.

Suddenly, he could sense that there was an unusually sharp wind surging forward, aiming at his back. The cup that Chang Geng placed on the side reflected a flash of razor-edged glint. Gu Yun hadn't had time to react, but Chang Geng had already rushed towards him.

Chang Geng grabbed him and rolled to the side, his arms tightening. At the same time, Gu Yun’s keen nose could catch a faint scent of blood.

An arrow with white steam that still hadn't spread at its tail grazed past Chang Geng, tearing his long sleeves open, revealing the wounded flesh inside.

Chang Geng looked up. Outside the quiet hot spring, a sharp metallic color flashed past: it was a 'Light Armor'!

The hot springs and the Northern Camp were only five miles away, even as one did not have to rush their horse, they would arrive in a moment. Where did this assassin come from?

The assassin did not succeed in his first move, but still he did not give up.

The heavy sunset has fallen to the west, the assassin who just shot the arrow jumped over the courtyard wall.

White steam surged from beneath his feet, and like lightning, he appeared in front of them in the blink of an eye. Gu Yun pushed Chang Geng aside, reached out and pulled out a steel sword from under the small table where the wine was, instantly crossing two moves with the assassin.

Gu Yun's skills were honed by clashing barehanded with iron puppets. Even though the Light Armor burned *Ziliujin*, he did not pay it any mind. However, after two moves, Gu Yun suddenly retreated back – he was shocked to find his hand shaking, overwhelmed by the weight of the steel sword.

Chang Geng could see at a glance that something was off. He reached for him and grasped his wrist, borrowing the sword in his hand, fiercely and accurately stabbing the assassin from his jaw. The tip of the sword directly pierced through the iron mask of the assassin, blood spurted out.

Chang Geng did not look at him. His fingers immediately slipped onto Gu Yun's pulse, saying in a low tone: "Someone had poisoned you."

Gu Yun’s chest felt numb, his heart squirting wildly inside. He let out a groan, momentarily unable to breathe. The numb sensation quickly spread to all his limbs, causing even someone like himself who could not see and hear to tense up considerably.

"It's nothing," Gu Yu gasped for breath. "I'm afraid it's not finished yet, you..."

His crow mouth had just finished speaking when a dozen of Light Armors appeared on top of the wall. At the same time, the soldiers guarding outside had also been alerted, charging forward.

There was no telling what was going on in those assassins’ minds. They did not flee even after their failed attempt, continuing to clash with the guards.

The guards of the Marquis's manor were soldiers retired from the battlefield, they could not be compared to the ordinary house guards, advancing and retreating with precision, extremely mobile. Chang Geng glanced at the battlefield that had completely leaned over one side, helping Gu Yun to the side: "Yifu…"

Gu Yun raised a finger to his mouth and patted him on the shoulder, he gently held his injured arm and motioned for him to take care of himself first.

Chang Geng did not pay attention to it, knelt down on one side and grabbed Gu Yun's wrist. At this moment, his pulse had returned to its order. Chang Geng tried to steady his mind, remembering that Gu Yun himself resembled a medicine jar, his resistance to drugs was much stronger than the average person.

It won't be so easy to knock him down completely. Perhaps just now as he was soaked in hot water, its effect had kicked in.

At this time, there was a loud noise in the courtyard. The entire mountain village shook. Even the half-dead Gu Yun was able to hear it.

It only took a moment, the assassins were already defeated by the well-trained family guards. When the commander ordered for them to be arrested, all the assassins simultaneously pierced the golden box on their Light Armors and exploded!

Gu Yun narrowed his not-so-useful eyes, lowering his voice: "Suicidal soldiers…"

The commander instructed people to put out the fire while running to Gu Yun: "Your subordinate is incompetent, the Marquis and His Highness please retreat first."

Gu Yun did not say anything, it seemed as if his mind was still somewhere far away.

For a time, his old memories that have long faded over the years were cruelly ripped out, his blood ran like water, baring its fangs, viciously surging up in front of him -- the deeper in time something

was, the clearer it would be.

That year, the blowing wind was engulfed in murderous intent, black irons covered one's sight, near and far were the scenery of withered and dreary pasture, flocks of vulture hovered when riding the horse among the high grass, it only took a few steps to land on white bones still marked with the tooth print of beasts.

Little Gu Yun who had not yet reached the height of a table — was being punished by the old Marquis for a meager mistake. He was to stand inside the camp and not allowed to eat breakfast. Any soldier passing by could not stop themselves from laughing as they caught sight of him, causing the tears of the boy whose pride was already vast from an early age to be suppressed inside, he would rather die than to let them fall.

At that time, the war had subsided, the *Ziliujin* tribute of the 18 tribes had already entered the national treasury, the goddess had been bestowed the status of the Royal Consort. Everything should have been peaceful...

Suddenly, a patrolling guard fell down on the side of little Gu Yun without warning. He was wearing Heavy Armor, his body bore no injury. The guards in his camp then collapsed one by one, the sound of fighting and shouting came abruptly from the outside. Little Gu Yun had never met with such a terrifying scene before. Momentarily stunned from fear, he instinctively wanted to find a weapon.

But he was too small, even with both hands, he could not afford to lift even the lightest sword.

The people charging in that day was also a group of suicidal warriors dressed in Light Armor. They acted as swiftly as the wind, approaching like the devils. One soldier who just now was still making fun of him struggled to rise up, like a dying bird, and protected little Gu Yun under his body.

He could still remember the image clearly even now — he had had his eyes wide open, staring at the soldiers who resembled pigs waiting to be slaughtered, they all fell down inside the camp, one by

one, in a heap of flesh and blood. He could feel something strike at his back, the pain caused his heart to tighten.

However, the pain would soon become numb. Gradually, he felt as if his limbs had all been cut off from his body, all the sounds and colors in his surroundings were gone, everything all faded. The consciousness that was soon to be scattered and the pounding heart that seemed to break his chest weaved together, he could not breathe...

He remembered he had also heard that same earth-shattering noise in a state of half-consciousness — the Princess had arrived, and those people blew themselves up with their armors.

Chang Geng held his shoulder: "Yifu!"

Gu Yun's gaze with absolutely no focus finally concentrated a little, he murmured: "Is there a wolf head tattoo on the bodies that had not been burnt yet?"

Chang Geng: "What?"

The commander was startled, suddenly lifted his head. Regarding this matter, the Gu family guards had a much deeper impression compared to Gu Yun who was still a child at that time: "The Marquis means to say..."

"When the fire had been put out, go check it," Gu Yun said with a blank expression. "Also the person who had used poison..."

Feeling that the effect of the drug in his body was gradually fading, he supported himself with Chang Geng's arm and stand up.

Chang Geng was shocked to find that his hand was as cold as a corpse, but Gu Yun releases his hold in an instant, almost seeming as if he did not want to come in contact with any person.

Gu Yun soullessly stepped forward. His liuli glass had shattered moments before, his eyes were no good, almost stepping into the hot spring pool as a result. Chang Geng rarely ever become so unstable, he instantly jumped up, holding Gu Yun from behind and escorting him all the way to the quarters.

Gu Yun’s spirit had gone far away, he did not avoid his grasp.

Chang Geng helped him into the room, pulling a thin blanket over him. He wanted to check his pulse again when Gu Yun suddenly said: "Give me medicine."

Chang Geng frowned: "No, inside your body there still is..."

Gu Yun’s complexion turned bleach, increasing his tone of voice: “I said bring me my medicine.”

Chang Geng was startled, instinctively understanding that Gu Yun was truly angry now.

A quiet sigh of murderous intent leaked out, the tyranny of thousands of iron armors weaved into Gu Yun’s pair of blind eyes. For a time, this handsome man appeared like an awoken statue of a demon, but only for a moment.

Gu Yun quickly recovered, his expression easing up. He searched around and patted Chang Geng’s hand: “Go tend to your injury first, then help me bring my medicine — not listening to me anymore, hm?"

Chang Geng was quiet for a moment, then upon turning to leave, he punched the pillar at the door.

At this time, a much larger storm was approaching the brightly lit capital with no warning.

At night, in a narrow alley, a thin haired elderly man finally glanced at his suicide letter on the table then hung himself on the beam of the house, ending his already withered life in the morning light.

As his heart was in an disorder, Gu Yun had forgotten to order the guards commander to block the news. The hot springs and the Northern Camp could almost be considered as neighbors, words quickly spread out like carried by wings.

Tan Hong Fei — the commander of the Northern Camp located in the suburbs of the capital — used to belong to the old faction of

the Black Iron Camp. When hearing that his Marshal had an attempted assassination right inside this crucial territory, right under his watch, he was utterly furious, personally leading one branch of the camp to conduct a thorough investigation.

No one would be able to hide such a large incident. In a flash, the news regarding Gu Yun had run far and wide, and this was only the beginning.

The next day, Gu Yun regained his eyesight and hearing. When he remembered his own mistake, it was too late — Tan Hong Fei had directly charged into the capital with his men.

The mayor who was deep in a mess was forced by General Tan to turn over the capital, investigating any suspected individuals arriving from outside. The messenger sent by Gu Yun to drag Tan Hong Fei back had just gotten off his horse, yet an unexpected person had already brought forth a suicide letter and sounded the drum.

The messenger did not dare to enter the mayor's manor, he could only send someone to inform them. Who would have expected that this place was already incredibly chaotic, and only after a long wait of one incense did someone finally led him inside.

But before he had the chance to speak, the commander of the Northern Camp Tan Hong Fei stood up abruptly, his eyes seemingly wanted to explode, cracking the table from one smash of his hand and causing the hat of Mayor Zhu who was sitting at his side to almost drop from fear.

Tan Hong Fei: "Who are you? Say it again!"

The middle-aged man holding up the suicide letter with both hands clearly spoke each words: "This peasant is a pastry shop owner outside the eastern suburbs. Our family has an old adoptive father who originally served under Emperor Yuan He — Eunuch Wu He.

“Many years ago, in order to avoid a misfortune, he had found someone to die in his stead. Luckily, he was able to escape from the palace. Since then, he been hiding among the common folks. But even after more than a decade, he was still discovered by the people

bearing ill intention, to avoid involving the family, he had taken his own life last night."

"This peasant is as trivial as a firefly, as fragile as a grass, my puny life isn't worth mentioning. But even so, my deceased father had left behind his instruction, for me to bring this horrifying injustice to light for the whole world to see!"

Mayor Zhu Heng instinctively realized that this would be an incredibly important matter, he hurriedly shouted: "How daring of you to talk nonsense! That year, eunuch Wu He had soon been locked inside prison for his crime of harming the Third Prince and was later executed. Are you blaming Da Li Temple for they had falsely charged him?"

The man bowed his head to the ground and respond: "This peasant has in possession the suicide letter personally written by my father before his death. Right now as I brought this head here to see you, there is not a single hint of dishonesty in my words!"

Back then, Eunuch Wu He had accepted bribes, as if he had turn mad, allying with a disfavored consort to plot the death of the Third Prince. This matter had once been a boiling topic, and as it involved Gu Yun who was still in the palace at that time, the subordinates belonging to the old faction of the Black Iron Camp wished nothing more than to cut the old mindless eunuch into pieces.

Tan Hong Fei's expression darkened: "Master Zhu, let us listen to what he has to say."

Gu Yun's messenger could instinctively feel something was about to break out, remembering the instruction of '*don't let Tan Hong Fei cause trouble'* before his departure, he immediately made a decision: "General Tan, the Marquis had asked for you to return to camp immediately."

Zhu Heng instantly followed suit: "Yes, General Tan please go back first. If there are any information regarding those criminals, I will immediately send someone to inform the general..."

At this moment, the middle-aged man who was kneeling down

suddenly spoke: "This peasant wishes to accuse former Emperor Yuan He, for he had been entranced by the wicked Consort of the Northern Barbarians, using treacherous tactics to harm loyal subjects…"

Chapter 55: Raging Fire

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Home and country, hatred and resentment — on this road separated in two, regardless of which path he chose, he could never look back again.

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Everyone was stunned from shock.

After a long while, the messenger finally remembered his mission for this trip, he said drily: "General Tan, the Marquis..."

"Shut up!" Tan Hong Fei suddenly shouted out loud, glaring his pair of bulls' eyes as large as a bell, then turned to the man who was kneeling in the hall. For a time, his throat was tight, and every hair on his the body stood up all at once: "What did you say? Be more specific — which loyal subject?"

The middle-aged man straightened up, his face was pale and sickly, appearing quite pitiful, yet he carried with him an indescribable determination: "Twenty years ago, the Northern Tribes were ravaged by a natural disaster. The Wolf King's ambition was overflowing, and he mobilized troops to invade us. With the Black Iron Camp's might, the old Marquis had stabilized the Northern Frontier, making the wolves bow their heads in defeat, sending their tributes and the goddess sisters into Great Liang's court. Former Emperor Yuan He had taken the older sister as a consort, bestowing upon the younger sister the title of a *Jun Zhu*,* entering the palace to serve and waiting to be wed to a member of the royal bloodline."

**the same title as a Jun Wang but for female.*

"Unexpectedly, these two demonic women harbored malicious intents. They first forged false letters of the old Marquis being in contact with the Wolf King back and forth, accusing him of threatening the eighteen tribes after the war ended, silently taking and storing *Ziliujin* for himself. They would then use dark arts to entrance the former Emperor, day and night creating a rift in the friendship between the ruler and the subject…"

Having heard these few sentences, Mayor Zhu had seemingly wanted to explode with anger, he instantly shouted: “Men! Capture this ignorant peasant who dared to degrade the former Emperor at once!”

Tan Hong Fei’s eyes almost cracked: “Let me see who would dare to!”

As soon as he roared, rows of Northern Camp soldiers by his side drew their weapons in unison, their swords shining like snow, patterns of ferocious beasts at the hilts seemingly wanted to come to life and devour everything.

Zhu Heng’s face turned pale green, and gathering the last bit of courage belonging to a scholar, his voice trembled: “Tan Hong Fei, do you want to rebel?”

Tan Hong Fei snorted, turning and striding down the stone steps, walking straight in front of the middle-aged man. He thrusted his large sword to the ground, standing tall like an iron tower, and pressed on: "You continue, what happened afterwards?"

The man said: "Does the general still remember, that year when the little Marquis was still young, with no one at home to attend to him, after the Frontier had been settled, the old Marquis had discussed it with the princess to bring him to the garrison.”

Tan Hong Fei's eyes flashed. In a few words, bygone memories were evoked from the faded flow of time. He still remembered clearly, the currently renowned Marshal Gu was a troublesome child no more no less, there was no havoc he could not cause, fearing no one. The old Marquis and the First Princess had no other elders to discipline him in their stead, and seeing that he was about to become completely lawless, they had no choice but to take him along.

Tan Hong Fei: "Yes, that is true."

The middle-aged man said: "The wicked woman took this opportunity to vilify the old Marquis, saying that this time as he brought along his only son with him, then he must certainly be plotting something grand, that perhaps he intended to divide the

country into East and West then rule alongside with the Emperor.

”Emperor Yuan He had been entranced by their spell, incredibly loathing the old Marquis, yet at the same time fearing the Black Iron Camp that could bring the Northern Barbarian to ruin with only thirty iron cavalry. He was at a loss for what to do.”

Tan Hong Fei: "Absurd!"

The middle-aged man’s expression did not change, continuing to talk: "At that time, the demonic woman and another traitor worked together to come up with a vile plan, ordering my deceased adoptive father — eunuch Wu — to use the excuse of rewarding the army, to lead thirty suicide soldiers and two men who were well-versed in dark arts to the Northern Frontier, mixing inside the garrison and carrying out the assassination.

“In order to prevent their scheme from being exposed in the future, they deliberately instructed the suicide soldiers to tattoo a wolf head on their chests, pretending to be barbarians.”

Tan Hong Fei's breathing was getting heavier and heavier.

That year, thirty suicide soldiers had blended into the garrison with no warning, seemingly to have fallen out of the sky. They first used the underhanded tactic of mixing powdered drug that could numb the limbs into their food and drink, then changed into Light Armors and carried out a surprise attack. Since their soldiers have been used to the scene of cavalry in Light Armors sweeping past every day, they were momentarily unprepared...

Tan Hong Fei muttered: "That's right, everything you said are correct. Back then, I was only a small general, those suicide soldiers in Light Armors, were indeed only thirty people.”

The Old Marquis used thirty Heavy Armors to destroy the eighteen tribes, the demonic woman returned back to him thirty Light Armors, causing the undefeatable Black Iron Camp to falter, even injuring the only heir of the Marquis of Order.

Tan Hong Fei suddenly laughed low: "That is the single most

shameful thing for the Black Iron Camp. I still remember at that time, the old Marquis had left the camp for patrol, Her Highness the Princess was feeling uncomfortable thus she did not take her meal. If not, perhaps on that day, the little Marquis won't be the only one who was injured, is that right?"

The Northern Camp commander fiercely smashed his long sword to the ground, the thick stone floor cracked at the impact: "In a fit of anger, the Princess had insisted there are spies inside our camp, more than ten of our brothers in charge of the defense of the Northern Frontier garrison could not avoid this felony, they were innocent yet logic spoke otherwise, unable to explain themselves, they could only unload their armors, one by one, returning to the capital for their punishment…

"After so many years, I still silently loathed her, for I have thought she had became mindless from the love she felt for her son… Turned out, it really is true…"

As Tan Hong Fei got here, his tears fell without warning. He did not wipe it away, neither did he get choked up. He remained still, standing tall like an iron tower, sniffling as if he was under immense pain.

Zhu Heng was stunned in place by the tears of the dark-faced Hell king. For a time, even his heart that was full of anger seemed to have been poked by something, his irritation slowly leaking.

Mayor Zhu could not help but ease his tone of voice and said: "This matter is of great importance, involving many parties. It would be unfair to listen to only one side of the story from this man, General Tan should be cautious."

Tan Hong Fei returned to his senses. The truth was, he already believed it seventy to eighty percent, no one understood more about the impenetrable defense of the Black Iron Camp than Tan Hong Fei who was tasked with the protection of the Northern Frontier garrison that year.

Even though Gu Yun had never once mistreated them — the old members of the Black Iron Camp — he even recommended him as the

commander of the Northern Camp, but Tan Hong Fei could never forget the grievances of his incompetence that he had to carry, with no one to express them to.

Tan Hong Fei glanced at Zhu Heng and clenched his teeth. He bowed his head and asked the middle-aged man: "Correct, what evidence do you have?"

The man took out the letter, bowing his head down: “This letter had been written by my father himself, his body is placed outside the entrance, After the general reads it, you will know whether he was Wu He or not, you will also know if my words were truth or lies.”

Zhu Heng frowned, but Tan Hong Fei had already ordered people to lift up the body.

A moment later, a male body resembling a dried up tree was carried inside. Death by hanging was certainly not peaceful, his cheeks were swollen, the tongue was exposed, and the throat was dyed in blue and purple. Tan Hong Fei only took a glance then immediately looked away, as if he could not bear the burden: "I remember that there is a scar in the shape of a triangle under the corner of the old eunuch’s eye..."

The middle-aged man kneeling on the ground slowly dragged himself towards the body, sweeping away the dry white hair. On the corner of the eyes covered in wrinkles and marks was indeed an old scar with the shape of a triangle.

The surrounding fell into dead silence, Zhu Heng’s face was completely bloodless. He suddenly took a deep breath then raised his hand to adjust the official hat that had leaned to the side due to a slap from General Tan. The hands of the scholar were still shaking, he asked: "What happened after?"

The man kneeling in the hall said: "Fortunately, the little Marquis was blessed by the heaven and did not perish in the face of misfortune. Later, when the former Emperor was awakened from the demonic woman’s magic, he had regretted it deeply, secretly disposing of the barbarian sisters and bestowing upon the little Marquis endless grace, even taking him in the palace to personally

care for him.

“Although the demonic woman had paid for her crime, but the villain who once gave this idea to the Emperor still remained. Greatly fearing that Gu family will continue to receive the monarch's grace just as before, he had joined with eunuch Wu to take action against the little Marquis once again.”

Zhu Heng: "The secret of the palace, you have to think clearly before speaking."

The middle-aged man laughed aloud: "Thank you. When I was young, I was a farmer who grew up in the Northern Frontier. My family have been tyrannized by the barbarians for generations. My parents and siblings have all been killed by them, it was the old Marquis who had saved us, avenged us. This peasant is of low status and have been bearing this burden for many years, serving this old eunuch not for the wealth nor the benefits of his family, but to wait for this day!"

Tan Hong Fei no longer had the heart to be surprised, his emotions seemed to have almost numbed: "But I remember the one who died that year was His Highness the Third Prince.”

"Yes," said the man. "Wu He applied a type of poison that can be scattered into the air on the steam lamp used daily by the little Marquis. Wu He had said — the little Marquis loved to turn the lamp to the brightest setting when he was young and often left it on all night, not turning it off even at bed time. After such a long period of time, the backside of the lamp always become hot enough to cook an egg. Naturally, the poison will be melted and mixed in the air, and will be inhaled into the lungs.

“The affected will start having fever continuously and would cough non-stop in the beginning. Since these symptoms are commonly seen in children, it will not be noticeable, but the body will be weakened over time, after the poison enters the internal organs, all medicine will be rendered ineffective.”

Tan Hong Fei’s eyes seemingly wanted to drip blood.

"At that time, the steam lamp used by the little Marquis in the palace was the kind with lampshade made from the colorful liuli glass especially sent by the Westerner. They were extremely expensive, only the young princes and the little Marquis used them, not even the Empress had one.

“Unexpectedly, the Third Prince accidentally broke his Western steam lamp. He got worried about being reprimanded, but did not dare to ask anyone for help either. The little Marquis then switched his own lamp for the Third Prince’s, secretly gluing the broken parts together, placing a book on top and pretending to use it normally as before.”

"What happened next, you all already know, the Third Prince died at a young age. The former Emperor was furious, ordering a thorough investigation of the inner palace. Wu He was imprisoned for his crime of murdering the prince, becoming the scapegoat for the traitor."

Just as the man finished this, he flipped his sleeves and bowed down to the ground, raising his voice: “This peasant had finished telling everything from start to finish, thank you to all of you, generals and officers. The vile man from that year who still walked outside the grasp of law right now is Imperial Uncle — Wang Guo!”

Zhu Heng was taken aback: "How courageous... you, how courageous of you!"

That middle-aged respond: "Courage as vast as the heaven, willing to leave this insignificant mortal body!"

Zhu Heng pressed on: "What is your evidence!?"

The middle-aged man took out a letter old enough to rot: "To answer the master, here is a letter that Imperial Uncle Wang and Eunuch Wu had secretly exchanged that year, you all will understand whether it is the truth after you have taken a look."

After that, the man placed the envelope on the ground then leaned back slightly, he seemed to let out a faint sigh.

"All grudges and resentment of the past, will all end here today."

When Tan Hong Fei noticed that something was off about him, it was too late. The man stood up. Before everyone could respond, he turned and charged straight into the pillar next to him.

Blood and brains scattered all around. He died on the spot.

This could be considered as another type of suicide soldier.

At this time, in the hot springs, Gu Yun’s eyelids would not stop twitching.

The manor's guards commander Huo Dan suddenly barged inside, completely out of breath from panicking: “Mar...Marquis..”

Gu Yun turned back: "What’s wrong?"

After learning about the change in the capital, Huo Dan’s heart had been jumping wildly in his chest, but he had not yet had time to open his mouth, when suddenly, the door was kicked open.

Chang Geng tightly held a wooden bird in his hand. The little thing had its beak open, its wings were flapping, and its head had been separated from the body. The hard wooden material was being crushed by him, the uneven gears inside were exposed, digging into his palm, creating a mess of flesh and blood.

But at this moment he did not seem to know pain. Like a fish that had left the water, he harshly gasped for breath, but his chest could not contain even one bit of air.

He had a piece of blood-covered sea grain paper in his hand. After all, the wooden bird was still faster than the horse. Someone had already passed along the hilarious event from the capital to him.

Chang Geng's chest felt as if there was a sharp knife, he could feel blood pouring with every intake of breath. He walked in front of Gu Yun in faltering steps and hugged him.

Huo Dan who was standing on the side was taken aback: "Mar..."

Gu Yun made a gesture towards him: "Old Huo, you go out first."

Huo Dan's throat twitched. He seemed to want to say something, then in the end, he silently took his leave.

The strength of this unfortunate kid was not at all meager, Gu Yun felt that his old waist was about to break under his hold. When Huo Dan already left, he reached out and patted his back: "What's wrong?"

Chang Geng lowered his head and buried his face on his shoulder, surrounding him was the Gu Yun's medicinal scent. In the past, this scent could only make him feel relieved. Even if he were to fall into nightmares, it could still break through the haze, but right now, he wanted to never sense this strong medicinal scent ever again.

Chang Geng closed his eyes, there were explosions inside his ears. His heart was empty with only one thought remaining: *I must kill the entire Li family.*

Gu Yun took the crumpled up piece of paper from his hand and swept his eyes through it. He instantly felt a chill. Strongly pushing Chang Geng away, he shouted: "Huo Dan!"

At the door, Huo Dan could hear the sound and immediately pushed the door in.

Gu Yun was about to go crazy. He stood up too abruptly, causing the scene in front of him to turn black for a moment. He grabbed the edge of the table, his arm won't stop trembling.

"Ready the horse, I must go back to the capital," Gu Yun took a deep breath, "You lead... *cough*..."

His voice broke when he got here, no sound could come out. He cleared his throat: "Take a few Light Armors and go ahead first, we must stop Tan Hong Fei."

Huo Dan gave him a deep look: "Yes!"

Gu Yun turned to take out his own attire and Light Armor, but Chang Geng had grabbed his wrist.

Chang Geng: "Is it true?"

Gu Yun looked down at him. Inside his eyes were surging cloud and raging wind, appearing very complicated.

After a pause, Gu Yun whispered: "Of course it isn't, magic is only nonsense without evidence, and Imperial Uncle is only..."

Only a servant under the throne, acting as he was ordered to. The Northern Barbarian sisters were only two pitiful people who have lost their home and country, straying far away to a distant land.

Everyone knew the truth, but no one dared to say it aloud.

Gu Yun pulled his hand away: "It's about to turn chaotic very soon, you shouldn't go back to the capital, stay here for a few days..."

Chang Geng refused to let him go: "Then does it mean, except for the parts regarding magic and Wang Guo, everything else was the truth? You knew, you have always known?"

Gu Yun was running out of patience: "What time it is already? You are still standing there causing more trouble, step aside!"

Chang Geng almost opened his mouth at the same time as him, his voice low: "Why are you still willing to pour all your heart and strength into guarding this broken country for him? Why are you still enduring countless compromise, condescending to their demands time and time again? Why did you take me in? Raising and caring for me for so many years?"

Compared to Gu Yun's angry shout, his whisper was as light as falling snow, yet there's no telling how but the moment the sentences left his mouth, the person who was meant to hear it was able to catch every word without fail.

Gu Yun's heart tightened.

Chang Geng's lips was completely pale, his gaze piercing through

him: “Yifu, why?”

Gu Yun’s throat jumped, he was at a loss for where to start – and how to start.

Truth to be told, he wasn't aware of what was going on inside either, he had always assumed his injury was only an accident. He always thought that he himself wasn't able to protect A Yan carefully enough and could only watch the boy die from the battle of the inner palace.

Up until...he was ordered to escort Jia Lai Ying Huo did he discover from the mouth of this man who harbored no good intentions that the poison of the savanna’s goddess are not to be passed on to outsiders. Throughout many generations, they were for her to know only, not even the tribes’ members were informed of.

The incident of thirty Light Cavalry causing great loss to the Black Iron Camp twenty years ago have absolutely no relation to the Man people.

Home and country, hatred and resentment — on this road separated in two, regardless of which path he chose, he could never look back again.

Countless hidden details inside were impossible to say aloud to outsiders. In the end, Gu Yun did not respond, forcibly pulling Chang Geng’s hand away, tying his hair and donning his armor.

The general had a heart, but unfortunately, it was cast from iron.

Gu Yun’s reaction couldn’t be said to be slow. Hundreds of the manor’s troops could not be said to be ineffective, and yet it was still too late.

- End of Volume 2 -

Volume III: Heavy Rain Does Not Stop [骤雨不歇] | Chapter 56: Thunder

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From now on, he was no longer the son or the younger generation of anybody.

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Chang Geng still chased after him outside: "Yifu, wait!"

Gu Yun had mounted his horse, looking down at him from above. The horse was as restless as its owner. Even when the reins were already pulled, it continued to pace back and forth in the same place.

The blood on Chang Geng's face seemed to have all been stuck onto his palm and his sleeve, he resembled a Bai Miao* portrait of a human drawn on paper.

**a style of artwork drawn using only linearts with no coloring.*

He appeared almost indifferent, the incredibly pained expression just now seemed to have been hidden under a layer of a mask: "In case Uncle Huo cannot suppress General Tan, yifu charging into the capital right now will be equal to leading yourself into the flame."

Gu Yun lifted his long eyebrows, he was about to speak when Chang Geng interrupted him.

"I know, even if you will be in the fire, you can't afford not to go to the capital for the imperial guards would not be able to stop the Northern Camp. As of the present, except for yifu, no one could control General Tan. Once the capital is shaken by this chaotic change, the consequences are unimaginable."

Chang Geng took a deep breath, then reached out to him a blood-covered hand. "In case the Emperor imprisons you, the generals

on all sides will inevitably be plunged into confusion, disaster will break out. I need yifu to leave me some kind of token that can temporarily calm people's hearts."

Astonishment flashed past by Gu Yun's face. The child who earlier just made him feel incredibly troubled had now become completely different.

Everyone had a lot of faces. Just like some people, while on the outside, they were capable of calling up the wind and storm with renown prestige. But once they returned to their relatives, they would become an ignorant child who didn't understand what was hunger or coldness.

Although Chang Geng was growing further and further away from the boy who did not know his manners, always calling him 'Shiliu', always relying on his little yifu — but after all, he still harbored admiration for Gu Yun deep inside his heart. Even in the middle of the night, when his love and desire arose, it was for this affection resembling that of a father's, a brother's, that would bring to him an indescribable sense of taboo.

Until this time as the east wind blew away his last bit of feeling of his teenage years.

In the shortest time, Chang Geng realized, he will be all alone on this path with no one who understood, and no one to accompany.

From now on, he was no longer the son or the younger generation of anybody.

Gu Yun took out his own private seal from inside his clothes and threw it to Chang Geng: "This thing could not be compared to the Tiger Emblem, but the older people who used to followed me all recognize it. Perhaps it could be useful, just in case... you could think of a way to invite General Zhong."

Chang Geng did not look at the private seal at all, directly placing it inside his sleeve, replying with indifference: "I know, yifu rest assured."

As soon as he finished, Gu Yun had already ushered his horse, charging off.

Chang Geng continued to stare at his back until his figure was out of reach. He suddenly closed his eyes, whispering in a soft voice: "Zi Xi..."

The manor guard on the other side weren't able to hear clearly, he asked: "What did Your Highness say?"

Chang Geng turned around: "Ready the pen and paper."

The guards quickly chased after: "Your Royal Highness, your hand..."

Chang Geng stopped his steps as he heard this, grabbing the wine bottle Gu Yun left behind. He expressionlessly poured all of the strong liquor onto his injured hand. The dried up wound once again began to bleed. He then took out a handkerchief and wrapped it around.

At this time in the capital, no one would expect that the death of an old eunuch could cause such enormous waves.

Tan Hong Fei unleashed the injustice he had felt and suppressed all these twenty years, perhaps he had already lost his mind. First, he sent troops to surround the Imperial Uncle's residence. When he learned that the old bastard had left his wife and children behind to hide himself in the palace, he immediately turned around, boldly went up against the imperial army arriving at the site for the rescue.

From before until now, the imperial guard and the Northern Camp were companions. As the last line of defense of the most

crucial territory, they would always run into each other.

The imperial guards were mainly composed of two parts: the 'young master' type who joined by the back door and ate imperial salary; and the elites selected from the Northern Camp. The former had long since wet themselves from fright and could not be relied on at all. The latter, although capable, but as they suddenly confronted their 'birth family', for a while, they were also in a dilemma. As Chang Geng had expected, the army was soon scattered.

The sound of performance on Qi Yuan tower was still echoing, warm flower wine and white fog have not yet disappeared, Sijiu City had already boiled up.

Tan Hong Fei led his men pressing outside the forbidden palace and took off his helmet as if he was holding his own head.

First, he knelt down and performed the formal courtesy of three deep bows in the direction of the main hall. Then, he shouted at the row of guards blocking in front of him, "Sinner Tan Hong Fei, greetings to Your Majesty. I ask of Your Majesty to please hand over the traitor who is now hiding inside the palace, giving justice to my millions of brothers and comrades who had protected our country, giving the world an explanation! Your subject is willing to pay for the crime of disrespecting the monarch with death!"

Inside the palace, Emperor Li Feng was able to hear this, but before he could afford to reprimand Wang Guo, he was already furious. The courage of the Son of Heaven was not at all comparable to the likes of the Imperial Uncle who fled with his tail. Li Feng almost even shattered the jade seal. Disregarding how people tried to stop him, he changed his clothes and came to the front of the hall, confronting Tan Hong Fei face to face.

Heavy soldiers and the palace guards were separated by a few inches of white marble steps, even birds on the wall would break a sweat.

In this utmost dangerous stalemate, Gu Yun finally arrived in time.

Gu Yun took with him only twenty people, forcefully opening a path through the Northern Camp currently surrounding the palace and went straight inside.

Witnessing this situation, the Marquis of Order could almost vomit blood from anger. He strode forward, pulled out his whip, then slashed directly at Tan Hong Fei's face with enough force to break the skin, he shouted: "Do you wish to find death?"

Tan Hong Fei eyes became red the instant he saw Gu Yun: "Marshal..."

"Shut up! What are you planning to do? Force the Emperor to abdicate?" Gu Yun kicked his shoulder, Tan Hong Fei almost slammed to the ground at the impact. "Do you still understand what is the proper order? Do you still understand what is loyalty? The Northern Camp is not allowed to enter the capital without the summoning command, where had you tossed this law to? Who gave you the courage to disrespect the ruler!"

Tan Hong Fei sat on the ground, his tears seemingly about to fall: "Marshal, it had been twenty years, the brothers had died in vain, the brothers had no one to express the injustice..."

Gu Yun lowered his gaze at him, his pupils ice cold, completely unmoved: "In half an hour, order the entire Northern Camp to retreat from all nine gates, if there is any delay, I will personally take your damn life, go!"

Tan Hong Fei: "Marshal!"

"Get out now!" The corner of Gu Yun's eyes was pounding intensely and twitching incessantly. He kicked Tan Hong Fei out of the way, kneeling down at the stone steps in front of the main hall.

"Your Majesty, please cease your anger. General Tan had suffered an injury in the past, he had soon shown signs of insanity, combined with being incited by the bad guys, perhaps he was momentarily blinded by the devils, his old illness recurring once again. I ask of His Majesty to please think of his many merits and his diligence throughout the years, to let him go back to recuperate, sparing the

life of this madman."

Zhu Little Feet took this opportunity and whispered to Li Feng's ear: "Your Majesty, you see, Marshal has also arrived, you are the one of utmost importance and cannot be at risk, let's avoid this for a moment inside the palace."

Li Feng laughed low from anger. He turned his head and glanced at Zhu Little Feet, speaking coldly, "What, even you would call him Marshal?"

Zhu Little Feet's face went pale, instantly kneeling down on the ground.

Li Feng folded his arms, stood on the white marble steps and looked down at the Marquis of Order in Light Armor from up high. For the first time, he understood one thing he never did before. Before his passing, the former Emperor had grabbed his hand and said again and again, that he must be careful of one person. It was not the incredibly ambitious *Wei Wang*, nor the foreigners resembling tigers — but his right-hand man, Gu Yun.

After half an hour, the Northern Camp withdrew from all nine gates. Together with Tan Hong Fei, more than a dozen generals involved were detained, the Marquis of Order was imprisoned.

At the same time, countless wooden birds took off from the hot springs in the northern suburbs, a few other Light Cavalry separated in two directions, fast on their steed, carrying the letters marked with Gu Yun's private seal, dressed in commoner attires, running towards the crucial territories of the Northwest and the Eastern Sea.

If Chang Geng had Black Eagles at his disposal at this time, even

if there was only one or two, perhaps he could have had a chance.

However, when Emperor Long An detained Gu Yun's marshal seal, he had already ordered all the Black Iron Camp officers around him back to the Northwestern station.

Once again... it was too late.

April, at the entrance of the Silk Road.

The bustling and prosperous scenery of a few months ago has long ceased to exist, all the guarding stations have been closed, the Black Iron Camp had readied their formation.

There were 'black crows' with murderous aura wherever everyone went. He Rong Hui was ordered to temporarily serve as the commander of the three factions. The Drumming Order from the capital was still on his desk, covered in dust.

On this day, the sky was bleak, thick and dark clouds hovered above the city, the garrisons of various countries had their gates closed tightly, dead silence hung in the air. Everywhere, golden sand flew past. There seemed to be something waiting to explode.

There was no telling whether it was only an illusion, but General He could sense that something was going to happen.

At this moment, a Black Eagle suddenly fell from the sky.

The Black Eagle faltered as he landed, swaying and rolled into the dust and sand of the Western Region. Coincidentally, a Light Armor patrol happened to catch this and immediately came to check.

Only to find that the killer of the sky seemed to be crushed by

the weight of his Black Eagle armor. Unable to stand up, he knelt on the ground, grasping his comrade's hands. The young face behind the mask was scarily haggard.

The patrol commander quickly came over and asked continuously: "Did General He not send you to the capital to see when can the Marshal get his seal back? How was it? What happened?"

The Black Eagle tightened his jaw, the gap between the teeth was full of blood, his handsome face was distorted. Pulling off his armor, he said in a hoarse voice: "I want to see General He..."

The Northern Camp was in trouble. Tan Hong Fei was put in jail. The commanders of the nine gates was afraid the news of the imprisonment of the Marquis would lead to a greater turmoil. After taking over the camp, the first thing to do was to send people to greatly secure the entrances and exits in the suburbs of the capital.

The Black Eagle had not yet landed, but he was already met with a wave of *Baihong* arrows. He managed to break out and landed with difficulty. He then disguised and blended in. He had learned the whole story from the beginning to the end from the boiling conversations of the people in the capital.

The Black Eagle had directly traveled back to the northwest in a fit of rage, just happened to pass by the cavalry sent out in the same direction by Chang Geng. The Eagle was countless times faster than the horse. He arrived at the Black Iron Camp garrison earlier than the other by a few days.

He Rong Hui — the gunpowder barrel — was blown up on the spot, bringing people charging into the northwestern governor's manor. But it was exactly at this crucial moment that the Sand Tigers lined up at the Kucha Kingdom slowly left the station and lifted their dark muzzles, aiming at the direction of the east.

The various forces involved have done everything they humanly could, the rest could only lie in the fate decided by Heaven.

But this time, Heaven seemed to have completely abandoned the

dynasty of the Li family whose fate was coming to its end.

On the still chilly Saibei wilderness —

The rolling ridge bent creating a gentle arc, wild flowers were eager to display their buds one after another.

The gray wolves stood high, the falcons howled as they hovered, the flags covered with oil and dust and the skins of animals flew together with the wind. The sky was green, the earth was dark and gold, and deep in the grass, there were thousands of troops and horses.

In the roar of cold iron and machinery, suddenly came a hoarse song.

"The cleanest spirit, even the heavenly wind wanted to kiss her skirt, all living beings will sing and bow their heads, kneel down where she sing and dance. Next year there will be herds of cattle and sheep, lush vegetation, blankets of flowers, spreading to the end of Tianshan Mountains. Next year there will be evergreen grass, the hare will come out of its nest, the wild horse will slowly return —"

It had been five or six years since Jia Lai Ying Huo — the barbarian Prince who directly pressed onto Yanhui town in a fit of rage — now inherited the eighteen tribes and officially became the true Wolf King. The northwest wind of the frontier had left on his features marks as deep as the cuts of a knife, repeatedly carved onto his face for thousands of days and nights, hatred and resentment soaked through his bones.

Nowadays, his hair had already been dyed with hints of grey, the ferocity in his gaze was withdrawn inside, completely undetectable.

His vast and far-reaching singing voice had already been covered with dust. He could only hum a few lines. The lyrics of the olden days remained, but his voice soon became incredibly hoarse.

He lifted the wine jug hanging at his waist, taking a sip of the liquor mixed with the rusty taste of iron, his expression tight, eyes focused on a figure flying over from the distance. The shadow side by side with the falcon came near. It was a Hawk armor suit, bigger than the Black Eagle, the helmet more fierce. With a sharp, ear-piercing noise, he landed in front of the Wolf King, lifting up a golden arrow made of unknown materials with both hands.

Jia Lai reached out to pick up the little golden arrow and poured wine on it. The smooth arrow pole slowly revealed a line of words written in the Eighteen Tribal language, The fine and curly handwriting stretched out under the hot liquor. It read: *Wolf King, please take the first move.*

Jia Lai took a deep breath. He had thought that once this moment arrived, he would be full of ecstasy.

But no, he discovered that after so many years, hatred had soon hollowed him out. Even if he was about to turn the tide, he had forgotten how to laugh or smile. The current Wolf King looked up at the heaven above him. The sunlight made him feel slightly entranced, as if the eyes of countless deceased were watching over him.

"It is time." He whispered softly, raising a hand in the midst of thousands of troops, engulfed in dead silence.

Then he slashed down.

The gray wolves lifted their necks and howled, charging forwards, heading to the direction of the south.

At the Southern Sea Islands, where greens lush all year, warm wind rustling.

In the night, a large black ship slowly entered an ordinary and quiet dock, but did not stop yet. A group of armed people donned in armors opened the hatch and rushed out. The uninhabited island suddenly became brightly lit.

There were rows of battle armor lined along the large rocks, reflected by the dim light of the fire, resembling an army of ominous and sinister soldiers.

Among the Heavy Armors, there was an enormous map for a marching route covering the entire underground passages deep below the Southern Frontier. What Gu Yun once sent people to dig out was only just the tip of the iceberg.

Finally, it was the originally peaceful and calm Eastern Sea —

Dong Ying warriors with long swords and snake-like ninjas dressed up as coastal Eastern people carefully rowed small boats through the sea and secretly slipped by, communicating with each other with strange gestures.

They gathered slowly from all different sides like ants, the usually bustling cargo ships withdrawn from Great Liang Harbour one after another, quietly turned to the direction of the Dong Ying Islands.

A long whistle that could carry through the air rang out in the boundless ocean.

The 'merchant ships' gradually gathered in a row, arranging in a formation, all in order. As they gradually left the patrolling area of the Southern Navy, the original flag of the merchant ships was suddenly lowered, replaced by the heavy battle flag of the Western Pope, flying on the blue sea, casting a large shadow below.

The change of the flag seemed to be a terrifying signal. A huge 'merchant ship' began to disintegrate, its disguise of peace fell into the sea, revealing the dark muzzles underneath.

This was a kind of 'sea Dragon' that had never been seen before. They were small and strange, could be hidden inside ordinary merchant ships, its speed resembling lightning, and when gliding on the sea, they were no different from a monster tearing through the wind.

The seven monsters dispersed at the flag's signal, a huge shadow then rose slowly from below the water.

The originally calm sea surface surged up like a hill. It was an incomparable enormous monster, breaking through the surface and revealing its strange 'head'. Thousands of sea Dragons and warships were glued to its numerous 'suckers' overhead, ready for action.

The pillars oared into the clouds were filled with *Ziliujin*. Under the working power of numerous connected gears, heavy iron plates and shells rolled up and revealed large and small cannons lining up, resembling countless sinister eyes. There was no trace of stagnation when turning.

The deck of this giant sea monster could contain at least ten of Great Liang's Dragons.

Next, the hatch door slowly opened up. A dark ladder came down like a tongue. Two rows of Western Navy wearing strange hats rushed out. Then, a black umbrella opened in the dark hatch, propped up, blocking the sea water falling from above. The white-haired Western man Gu Yun once encountered in the palace bowed his head, calmly walking under the umbrella.

The man who held the umbrella for him came out half a step

behind. It was 'Master Ja' who had toyed with the bandits in the Southern Frontier that year.

The author has something to say:

This is the beginning of Volume 3, the story has a total of four volumes =w= this volume is slightly longer.

Chapter 57: National Disaster

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Two hours later, the surprise attack on the Black Iron Camp in the Western Regions shocked the government, frightening the people.

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"Your Majesty, you can now rest assured," Master Ja reached out and supported the white-haired man. It turned out that the man who had visited Great Liang many times before, claiming to be a messenger, was actually the Pope himself.

Master Ja: "Although there are countless deviations along the way, in the end, the final result had not wasted the time and energy you have put here."

The Pope watched the ferocious sea monsters on the blue ocean surface. His face was quiet without happiness and sorrow. It seemed that not only was he not joyous, he even bore with him a kind of indescribable sadness and melancholy.

"It is still too early now to speak of the result." The Pope said, "Fate is a very mysterious thing. The fate of a person is not predictable, let alone an entire country? This is something only God could know."

Master Ja: "For example, when that moronic Jia Lai wasn't able to hold back and disclosed that matter to Gu Yun in advance?"

Jia Lai Ying Huo had resented the last member of the Gu family too immensely. In addition to this hatred, there was nothing left in his entire existence. He had long left behind the dignity of a Wolf King and became a mad dog. He could no longer see the grander picture. In his view, as long as he could bring down Gu Yun, he did not care whether he destroyed someone else's planning.

However, they must cooperate with this mad dog. The hatred entangling for generations between the Eighteen Tribes and the

Central Plains was too deep, the forces currently in hiding left behind in the capital by the deceased goddess were also incredibly important.

"I truly admire that Gu Yun," sighed Master Ja. "If I were him, who knows what I might have done already, but he quietly handled all these things. Otherwise, the truth that we turned over today will absolutely be even more insane than what it is now. The garrisons in different locations may have already been... what do they call it? '*Qing jun bian*'*?

**eliminated the traitors next to the ruler*

The Pope: "This effect is not ideal, but there is no other chance. An opportunity is as fleeting as time, we have no choice."

"Jacques, all of us are trapped beasts, we are all looking for a way to survive. If we do not devour the others, then we will be devoured. Countless pair of eyes are staring at this large and appetizing herbivore, we must take one step ahead first, otherwise, we will not necessarily have the power to go out for battle after three or five years in the future."

Master Ja looked at the sea, everywhere was water, the sea and the sky shared the same shade. He partially could not comprehend: "Your Majesty, if this is only a herbivore, why should we pour in so much effort to plug away its fangs?"

"Carnivore or herbivore, the differences do not lie in its fangs nor its shape," the Pope murmured. "You must assess whether it is greedy, whether it has the heart that is eager to bite and swallow… were you able to detect that scent?"

Master Ja was dumbfounded. Ziliujin with high purity when burnt created almost no scent, probably only Gu Yun and dogs would be able to detect it. He tried to ask: "Your Majesty refers to... the scent of sea water? "

"It is the stench, my son," the Pope whispered. "If the devil truly existed in this world, then it would definitely be this little mineral with blue and violet flame. From the day it pierced through the

ground, it had ignited this damn era. It turned the Children of God into the hearts of iron monsters."

Wasn't the machine that burns *Ziliujin* not man-made?

Master Ja shrugged, he did not rebut, but he also somewhat disagreed.

The Pope no longer explained, he only bowed his head and began to kiss the ring on his hand with the symbol of a scepter and repeated a simple prayer.

"Forgive me," he whispered. "Please forgive me."

At this time, a cluster of signaling fires in deep blue color suddenly appeared at the two leading ships, soaring into the high sky.

The shade of Master Ja's eyes seemed to have blended with the color of the flame. He tried to contain himself, but for a while, it was still difficult to suppress his excitement: "Your Majesty, it begins!"

The seventh year of Long An, the eighth day of April.

It was the third day since the Marquis of Order Gu Yun moved from the hot springs to the prison cell of the capital.

The dungeon was very cold and sinister. Fortunately, as the capital entered spring, the chill had gradually dispersed. It was already warm, the pile of grass and straw in the cell was even softer than his marching bed in the military camp. It was not uncomfortable to live in for a few days, Gu Yun thought of it as going on a vacation.

All around him were silent. There wasn’t even an inmate to chat with. The jailer was a puppet that could not speak. This was the innermost cell in the imperial prison, if one wasn't of the royal bloodline, they were not allowed to enter. Even Tan Hong Fei, the commander of the Northern Camp was not qualified to stay.

The last person who qualified to be here was *Wei Wang*, the

biological brother of the Emperor. Gu Yun enjoyed the single room treatment, there was no other choice but to stay alone.

But even if someone chatted with him, he would not be able to hear it either. The medicine he rushed to drink before leaving has already worn out. The color of the two beauty marks on the earlobe and the corner of his eyes had faded to the point of almost being invisible. He did not bring the liuli glass either. When opening his eyes, he could barely count his fingers. The footsteps of the puppet coming in and out were also hazy.

To kill time, he caught a mouse to raise, leaving a few bites every meal to feed it. With nothing to do, he would play around with it.

That incident was deliberately dug up by someone, Gu Yun could tell. When he secretly investigated five years ago, he had wiped out a few deadly evidences, but did not touch Wu He. First, he was only an old dog clinging to life. Second... he feared that in the end, he was not without selfishness. He was not willing to let this unforgettable truth disappear forever.

Gu Yun admitted that this was his error. If he could possess half the amount of calmness he had today, he would understand whether he should have collected these things and waited for the right time, pushing them out and rebelled already, or he should have destroyed all that had gone by, buried them in the past and never let them see the light again.

Thousands of mistakes, he should not have hesitated where he should be decisive.

Much like Emperor Yuan He, if the old man did not hesitate, there would never exist a Gu Yun, perhaps the world could have had another kind of peace.

Gu Yun did not know what would happen in the future, nor did he know whether Chang Geng who had just entered the world could truly be able to stabilize the hearts of the military forces on all sides. However, he was currently in prison, it was useless to worry, he must first relax and regain his strength.

Later, the mouse found that this man's itchy hands were too annoying. He was troublesome, but it was also unable to escape, thus it directly played dead and no longer paid attention to him.

The little Marquis that was hated by dogs and cats had to idly lean against the wall. He felt that the attitude of this mouse was similar to that of Chang Geng when he was young.

Gu Yun started to think of Chang Geng, then he could not help but sigh, complaining to the mouse: "I'd rather that he would dislike me for bothering him every day like in his childhood."

The mouse gave him a very round butt in response.

Gu Yun took a deep breath and forcefully kicked out this last bit of thought. Not picking and choosing, he pulled the moldy rug on the haystack, laid it on his body and closed his eyes to rest.

Only with good spirits could one face a difficult future.

No one could bother this half-deaf in the prison. Gu Yun soon fell asleep, he saw a dream in the cold musty smell.

Gu Yun dreamed he was lying on his back under a giant butcher knife, the heavy blade pressed on his chest, bit by bit cutting through the skin and flesh into his bones, breaking him alive in two halves, disconnecting his body with all his limbs. Only the wound across his chest ached incredibly. In his ears, there lingered the noises of crying, gunfire and howling, combined with the intermittent sound of Hu Jia*, off-toned and vague, like a spider web...

**a type of musical instrument like a flute*

He was split by the knife, but there was no blood on the wound. Instead, a signal arrow fell out and surged to the sky with an ear piercing noise, exploding and shaking the nation.

Gu Yun woke up with a muffled groan. The old wound on his chest ached inexplicably. The piercing sound of the signal arrow in his dream continued to echo in his ears, forming into a strange type of tinnitus.

There seemed to be a bizarre link between him and his Black Iron Camp. That night, the first ominous signal arrow exploded in the night sky at the garrison in the Western Regions.

The Emergency Battle Report arrived in the capital only one day later. The Black Eagle soldier who came to deliver the message had only one leg left. With one last dying breath, he arrived at the Northern Camp currently in a state of panic and died before he could say a word.

Two hours later, the surprise attack on the Black Iron Camp in the Western Regions shocked the government, frightening the people.

When news of the incident in the capital spread, He Rong Hui led people to besiege the Northwest Governor manor. As soon as he left, Ku Cha Kingdom sent 160 Sand Tigers as the lead, forcibly piercing through the Black Cavalry Patrol camp located at the entrance of the Western Regions.

The chariot Sand Tiger was the biggest enemy of the Light Cavalry. For a moment, smoke and dust covered the air, flames rose like a curtain, battle horses cried out and died, iron cavalry fell down one after another.

But the Black Iron Camp was still the Black Iron Camp in the end. After a moment of confusion, they immediately reacted. Black Armors did not hesitate to press on. He Rong Hui immediately returned with Black Eagles after receiving the news, decisively cutting off the supply line of Sand Tigers from the air directly. Giant combat vehicles consumed fuel excessively. Once their supply was interrupted, they would instantly become a pile of scrap copper and iron.

But the Sand Tigers that came knocking on their door was no bluff. Behind it, just like how everyone had feared, were tens of thousands of troops bearing flags.

The foreigners at the stations of countless countries, even the Tianzhu people who had taken this opportunity for their advantage… the number surpassed what they had imagined. Even though they were only a mob of lousy bunch, they were still a 'mob'. With Sand

Tigers on the side, the Black Iron Camp could only use Heavy Armors to resist, and soon the two sides began to fall into a battle of *Ziliujin*.

He Rong Hui urgently opened up the *Ziliujin* storage of the Western Regions Camp and was shocked at the realization that there were not much left. When Emperor Long An thoroughly investigated the smuggling of *Ziliujin*, Gu Yun had no choice but to suspend the hidden supply line in his hands. The amount given to them by the court was only enough to maintain everyday patrol, it could not sustain in a sudden outbreak of such large-scale battles.

He Rong Hui sent people to deploy, but the path to deploy *Ziliujin* was blocked again. The news of the imprisonment of the Marquis of Order had spread. No one could tell the specific situation. At this time, people were panicked, there were all kinds of rumors. At this life and death situation, who would dare to deploy *Ziliujin* to the Black Iron Camp without the Drumming Order?

What if they wanted to press in the capital for a rebellion?

He Rong Hui sent a Black Eagle to the capital on the one hand, and on the other hand, approached the city defense forces of Northern Frontier for help. However, the messenger hadn't left yet, but the Northern Barbarian suddenly rose up. News of the Wolf King Jia Lai Ying Huo personally leading this expedition smashed down on them.

Five years of stability, the iron wall had turned upside down.

Jia Lai Ying Huo with tens of thousands of elite soldiers and thousands of Heavy Armors, he even had a type of invincible 'Hawk' which sizes were bigger and even more lethal than the Black Iron Camp's Eagle, bit into the Northern Frontier's defense which stretched for thousands of miles.

The northwest suffered a defeat that could no longer be saved. Without the Marshal’s order, even if the last soldier died, the Black Iron Camp did not dare to retreat one step back. He Rong Hui struggled to hold them off for three days and two nights, the troops have been beaten to the bottom, the god-like army created by the accumulation of three generations was about to lose more than half.

At that moment, Chang Geng's messenger finally arrived.

With Gu Yun's private seal, the Royal Highness who had never made himself known or display his talents from far away at the capital had imitated Gu Yun's handwriting seamlessly.

He handed two letters in total to the messenger — if the border was still stable, he would give him the first letter, telling He Rong Hui to not be concerned about the court, whether if it was from the black market or other means, immediately secretly fill up the *Ziliujin* storage in the Western Regions, maintain the armors and be ready for a battle at any time.

In case the frontier's situation had changed, the second letter would be given to He Rong Hui, telling him he must not sacrifice himself to defense, he must not be eager to fight and quickly shrink their forces to the east of Jiayu Gate and wait for reinforcement.

The enemy hiding in the dark had already started to move, it was undoubtedly too late now for them to act. There was no Black Eagle in Chang Geng's hands. There were too few people he could get in contact with by the wooden birds in Lin Yuan Pavilion. No matter whether the sky fell or if the earth shattered, the messenger could hardly arrive on time. Therefore, he had envisioned the worst case scenario and tried his best to mend the cage after the animals had been lost.

If the Western Regions had changed, it would be difficult for the Northern Frontier to take care of themselves. Therefore, General Cai Fen, commander-in-chief of the Central Plains garrison, would receive another letter from Chang Geng at the same time the Black Iron Camp retreated, asking him to increase his troops to the north and to send his portion of *Ziliujin* and heavy troops to Jiayu Gate as soon as possible to relieve this burning urgency.

However, Chang Geng's heart was clear. If something really happened, this deployment was not enough.

The hundreds and thousands of mountains in the southwest was completely out of his control. Although Shen Yi was on that side, he was a commander in name only and had no foundation. It was

impossible to arbitrarily dispatch troops without the Drumming Order.

The Eastern Sea Navy was even more concerning. General Zhao You Fang was Li Feng's man, it was impossible to mobilize that side with only a private seal from Gu Yun.

Coincidentally, Chang Geng had a hunch, that even if he could manage to put out the fire other places, hidden in the vast ocean of the Eastern Sea must be another fatal blow.

The news brought back by the Black Eagle truly did confirm the very worst scenario he had imagined. Chang Geng took a deep breath and released the last wooden bird. He turned back and spoke to Huo Tong whose blood was already bubbling in his mouth: "Ready the horse, I want to go to the palace."

At the gate of the palace, Chang Geng was stopped by Liao Ran, the monk was weather-beaten, but his expression remained tranquil and unwavering, as if regardless of how urgent something could be, they would all be dispersed by the marks of incense on his head, blown away into ash by the words 'Amitabha'.

Liao Ran: "Amitabha, Your Royal Highness..."

Chang Geng interrupted him indifferently: "Master needn't say more. I'm going to the palace to await orders, not to force the Emperor to abdicate."

Liao Ran's expression changed slightly, gesturing: "The monk believes that Your Royal Highness has this proper measure."

"I don't have any sense of propriety," The Fourth Prince who was well-versed in conversations had torn away from his gentle demeanor and said bluntly, "Using Qinling Mountains to divide into north and south, the southeast and southwest are out of control. Even if I can kill Li Feng on the spot, it could not clean up the current messy state of affairs, not to mention that no one can succeed the throne at the moment. The emperor's eldest son is nine years old, the empress is simply a useless, diseased-ridden woman with only her appearance, Zi Xi is unjustified for the position, and I..."

He sneered: "I am the son of the demonic woman of the Man tribes."

Liao Ran watched him with concern.

"Master, rest assured, I am a poison myself. If I had acted at will, I would have already begun to do harm to the country and the people. But I haven't done anything yet, have I?" Chang Geng's expression faded once again. "Now is not the time to speak of this matter, the foreign enemies had invaded. Perhaps they had planned this for a long time. This matter is not over yet, but they reacted too quickly. I suspect that inside the palace... even beside Li Feng, there are spies of the enemy. Does Lin Yuan Pavilion have anyone that could be of use in the palace?"

Liao Ran looked at him with all seriousness, he signed: "Your Highness means..."

Chang Geng: "This incident involved the old case of twenty years ago, the Northern Barbarian would definitely be related to this matter. Investigate all the people those two barbarian women came in contact with in the palace at that time — anyone. The northern sorcerer excelled at using poison, they had many vile tricks up their sleeves, do not overlook any bit of clues, not even the smallest ones."

When he spoke of 'the two barbarian women', his voice was unchanging, as if he was referring to someone who had no relation with him.

"I should have felt strange," Chang Geng whispered. "That year, Li Feng easily released Jia Lai Ying Huo like releasing the tiger back to its mountains. As expected, what happened behind everything was not at all simple, but unfortunately..."

It was a pity that he was too young at that time, his heart was only the size of a fist, it could only contain the little troubles of a young man who had left his hometown.

"If I had been born ten years earlier…," Chang Geng suddenly said.

Liao Ran's eyelids jumped.

Chang Geng forced out each word: "The world would absolutely not have turned out this way."

He would never let go of Gu Yun either.

"Zi Xi had said before, our court's sea Dragons are ten years behind compared to other military factions. I am worried that the Eastern Sea will not be peaceful. General Zhao had the talent to defend, but he would not necessarily be able to handle a war." Chang Geng said, "I have written a letter to Teacher, Lin Yuan had a strong foundation in Jiangnan, I will trouble the Master to go provide them with support, my apologies for I cannot accompany you."

Liao Ran rarely frowned, but there was no telling why. Chang Geng's 'Zi Xi' had frightened the soul out of him.

However, in this urgent situation, it was not the time to ponder about a pronoun. The monk dressed in an attire made of coarse cloth, his figure instantly disappeared into the morning light, departing right away.

Chang Geng just set foot into the palace, bad news had already fallen onto their head. The intense news of the frontline military situation arriving one after another made Emperor Long An and all the court's magistrate at a loss for how to react —

The Black Iron camp had retreated to Jiayu Gate.

Northern Frontier lost seven cities in a single night...not even able to wait for Cai Feng's reinforcements to arrive.

The Southern Frontier rebel mobs seemed to have already discussed it beforehand, allying with the Southern sea bandits and mysteriously exploded the southwest supply storage .....

"Report —"

Everyone present at the main hall turned pale, looking over at

the entrance. Li Feng didn't even had time to let Chang Geng greet him.

"Your Majesty, eight hundred miles expedited report, there are 100,000 Western Navy using the path of the Dong Ying Island to invade —"

Li Feng eyes seemingly wanted to crack: "What about Zhao You Fang?"

The messenger bowed to the ground and choked out in tears: "...General Zhao has already sacrificed for the country."

Chapter 58: Suspended Blade

—

"Heed my decree... Go invite Uncle here."

—

Li Feng's whole body shook, Chang Geng watched him fall down on the throne with a blank expression. Suddenly, at the area outside of his rational sense, a type of cruel satisfaction was arising in him. However, Chang Geng was very strict towards himself, he pinched his palm in silence and pressed back the bloodthirsty pleasure - he knew it was the Bone of Impurity messing with him, it was not his true self.

Chang Geng opened his mouth and spoke with not much sincerity: "Your Majesty, please take care."

It seemed as if the person who said he wanted to kill Li Feng was not him.

Yan Bei Wang just spoke up, the other dumbfounded magistrates in the main hall immediately reacted and followed his lead: "Your Majesty, please take care."

Li Feng's eyes slowly fell on Chang Geng. This was his only brother in name, but he seldom ever noticed him. Since his Royal Highness Li Min inherited his title and entered the court, he almost never spoke up, nor did he deliberately acquaint himself with other magistrates. He did not even use Gu Yun's name to make conversation with military officers. He only occasionally chatted with a few poor scholars about poetry and books.

Chang Geng acted as if he had not noticed his gaze at all, his face remained unchanged. "General Zhao had sacrificed himself, there is no barrier left in the Eastern Sea. Westerners would immediately be able to make a direct push to Da Gu Harbor as soon as they turned north. It was too late to say anything now, Royal Brother please get rid of distracting thoughts and immediately come to a decision."

Of course, Li Feng knew this, but his heart was a mess, he

momentarily did not know what to say.

At this time, Imperial Uncle Wang, who had been turned ashen by rumors revolving around him in the common folks for these several days, watched the Emperor's face and dared to say, "Your Majesty, there is only one big garrison that is the Northern Camp in the outskirts of the capital, surrounded by nothing but even plains. If we were to clash with them here, our troops will certainly be insufficient."

"Moreover, the case of Tan Hong Fei's rebellion is still inconclusive. There is almost no leader in the Northern Camp right now. If the entire Sea Dragons in Jiangnan were to be destroyed, what could the Northern Camp do? Who could protect the safety of the capital? The best course of action at this moment is to...how about we...ah.."

Wang Guo did not finish his sentence, for the eyes of the group of generals in the hall were nailed to him like *Baihong* arrows.

This old bastard had not even yet cleaned his own behind. A slight wind just rose up and he already dared to convince His Majesty to move the capital elsewhere, if it weren't for this situation of enemies invading from outside and chaotic state of affairs on the inside, perhaps everyone would have cut him to pieces.

Wang Guo swallowed thickly and breathed out, bending his back, not daring to look up.

Li Feng's expression was unfathomable. He was quiet for a moment then completely ignored Wang Guo and only said: "Let Tan Hong Fei return to his position, give him a chance to atone for his wrongdoings with merits... I called you all here for discussion, anyone who still talked bullshit, then get out right now!"

In this urgency, even the crude language belonging on the street could come out of the Emperor's mouth. The hall instantly fell into dead silence, red and white flashed on Wang Guo's face.

Li Feng impatiently turned to the Ministry of War: "Subject Hu, you are in charge of military affairs, holding the Drumming Orders,

what do you say?"

The Minister of War was naturally born with a pale and green complexion combined with a long face. His name was 'Hu Guang', which sounded similar to 'sweet melon', thus some people would secretly call him Minister Melon in private.

As Minister Melon heard Li Feng's words, his face twisted into a bitter melon. In name, the Drumming Order was issued by the Ministry of War, but how could the Ministry of War dare to send them out? He was only but a pen in the hands of the Emperor, would a pen dare to have an opinion?

Hu Guang wiped a cold sweat, talking with a lack of confidence: "Oh... Your Majesty is right, the capital is the foundation of our Great Liang. It is the place where the people's hearts turn to. How could we let those foreigners barge in here? What kind of proper order would that be! Even if we only have a single pawn left, we have to fight to the end. If we were to retreat now, it would only dishearten the troops."

Li Feng truly had no patience to listen to his nonsense repeating like a spinning wheel, he immediately intercepted him: "I asked you how to fight!"

Hu Guang: "..."

Everyone was glaring at Wang Guo, but the man was right. If the Jiangnan Navy commander had already died in battle, who could be in charge of the Eastern Sea? How were they supposed to mobilize troops?

In the event of the foreigners going north, how many rounds of cannons could the Northern Camp and the Imperial guards be able to block?

On a certain level, Wang Guo could also be considered as courageous, at least he had dared to speak of the truth that everyone else could not.

Hu Guang suddenly became a rotten bitter melon, cold sweat

dripping similar to running juice.

Just then, Chang Geng suddenly spoke up.

The young *Yan Bei Wang* stepped forward: "Would Royal Brother be willing to listen to a few words of mine?"

Hu Guang cast a grateful glance over at him, Chang Geng gently smiled: "Royal Brother first cease your anger, water that had been spilled cannot be taken back, the dead cannot be resurrected. The predicament of the border on four sides has become an established fact, it is useless to argue and be angry. Rather than a commotion, it's better for us to think about what else we could do to save this situation."

Perhaps because he had followed a monk for a long time, his body did not linger the flame and smoke of the common world. Standing in front of the hall, his calmness soaked through the insides, even the fire of rage had unconsciously eased up with him.

Li Feng secretly let out a breath and waved his hand: "Go on."

Chang Geng: "At the moment, the Central Plains has been caught in the fire, the soldiers have been moved, but the rations have not been prepared. It is inevitable to witness the scene of insufficient supplement, thus I ask of Royal Brother to please open the national treasury and send out all *Ziliujin*. This is the first matter."

"Yes, you have reminded me," Li Feng turned to the Ministry of Housing, "Immediately coordinate with the others..."

"Royal Brother," Chang Geng interrupted him. "Your subject had said to send out everything - in this extraordinary period, the Drumming Order had already become a burden. The generals are still carrying shackles as such, does Royal Brother wish to tie them up to go on the battlefield?"

If someone else were to speak these words, it would have been extremely offensive, but there was no telling why, coming from the mouth of *Yan Bei Wang*, no one could feel angry.

Hu Guang who had just been left aside quickly followed suit:

"Your subject agrees."

Not waiting for Li Feng to open his mouth, the group from the Revenue faction had bubbled up, the Minister of Revenue raised his voice: "Your Majesty, we absolutely must not. At this time, the distribution of *Ziliujin* truly could solve the urgent need, but allow your subject to say a few unpleasant words. In case when this situation is prolonged, after solving it today, what will come of tomorrow? Are we going to use the portion of next year?"

The commander of the Imperial Army perhaps truly wanted to cut down the head of the Minister to wrench out the water in his brain, he instantly retorted: "The enemies have already pressed on at the door, but in all of you gentlemen's heads are careful calculations for the meager daily expenses, this general truly had his eyes open."

"Your Majesty, if we do not extinguish this fire, how could there be a 'tomorrow'? In case when all four sides are trapped in a dead end, simply relying on the few small *Ziliujin* mines in the territory of our country, even if we turned over three feet of land, we will not be able to last for long!"

Hu Guang seemed to fear that he could not have an input. With his face red, he shouted at the top of his lungs: "Your subject agrees!"

Chang Geng had only said one thing, he hadn't had the chance to speak of how to suppress the enemy, yet a chaotic argument had already broken out. He did not speak up and patiently stood still on the side, waiting for them to finish their battle of words.

Li Feng's brains seemingly wanted to crack open. Suddenly, he came to a realization. These 'pillars' of the court could only ever care about the measly matters belonging in the one square of land they stood on. If they all were to be fired to the kitchen, perhaps they could argue out a table full of new dishes as vast as a nation.

"Enough!" Li Feng burst out.

The surrounding was silenced, Chang Geng continued his words in a timely manner: "Your subject had not finished yet, for the second matter - Your Majesty please be ready to retract back our forces."

As soon as this statement came out, the ministers once again boiled up. Even the wrath of the Son of Heaven could not hold back the noisy commotion in the hall. Several older men seemed to be ready to smash their heads against the pillar.

Li Feng's eyes twitched, the flame of anger rushed to his throat. He could barely hold back to not slash out on Chang Geng. He frowned, trying to suppress his anger and whispered a warning: "A Min, there are certain things you must think of carefully before you speak it out, the ancestors had passed down this nation to my hands, not for me to cut the land to raise the tigers."

Chang Geng remained unchanged: "Your subject would like to ask Royal Brother to please feel the pockets. Using all of our nation's resources right now, how many territories will we be able to save? This is not 'cut the land to raise the tigers', but instead, a warrior cutting his hand. Not cutting when it should be cut, waiting until the poison had soaked deep, until after we have been utterly defeated by the Westerners, would we decide to cut it only then?"

His plain tone of voice resembling the reciting of the Analects of Confucius was like a bucket of cold water, pouring onto Li Feng's head without mercy.

Chang Geng did not look up to see the Emperor's expression, he continued on: "Thirdly, Master Wang has said it well, right now the northwest still had the Black Iron Camp, even if they have suffered heavy loss, they could still hold on. The one of utmost importance right now is the Eastern Sea, once the foreigners go north, the Northern Camp's fighting power is quite concerning. Reinforcements near and far have all been pinned down and may not be able to arrive in time, what would Your Majesty plan to do?"

In the blink of an eye, Li Feng had been forced to age ten years by his words, after a long moment of feeling dejected, he finally said: "Heed my decree... Go invite Uncle here."

As Chang Geng heard this order, he did not even blink. There was no joy or anger, as if this was what should be done, all according to reason and logic.

Zhu Little Feet did not dare to even breathe out, just as he was about to take his leave, Chang Geng suddenly reminded: "Your Majesty, escorting someone from the Imperial prison with only Eunuch Zhu would quite appear like a joke."

He had instinctively distrusted any of the servants around Li Feng, including this man who has been secretly helping Gu Yun.

Li Feng said powerlessly: "What time is it already, still paying attention to such trivial details. Subject Jiang, you can go in my stead."

Zhu Little Feet strode after Jiang Chong with small steps, he could not help but glance at Chang Geng far away.

He was an elderly inside this palace. In Great Liang's court, every high ranking member of nobility and royalty, there was not a single person whom he isn't familiar with, *Yan Bei Wang* being the only exception.

He was carefully protected inside the Marquis's manor since childhood. After growing up, he did not 'work properly' but instead mostly traveled everywhere and seldom ever shown himself. Aside from mixing in the crowd to listen to politics on the court, he almost never entered the palace alone and only went together with Gu Yun on the New Year occasion to pay regard. No one knew any information about him.

Not knowing anything means he himself was a variable.

Jiang Chong and Zhu Little Feet were fast on their steed, heading straight for the imperial prison. When nearing the destination, Zhu Little Feet suddenly remembered and said in a small voice, "No, Master Jiang, the Marquis will be entering the palace to meet the Emperor, it would be inappropriate while still wearing prison clothes. How about I send someone to check the first-grade formal attire made this year and fetch one right away?'

Jiang Chong was currently full of grief and indignation by the collapse of his home country, his soul was pulled back by the voice of the old eunuch, he did not know whether to laugh or cry: "When is it

already? You still remember the little details, I..."

Before he had finished speaking, he could see a man charging towards them on a horse, arriving in the blink of an eye. He dismounted and paid his regard - it was Huo Dan, the commander of the Marquis's manor house guards.

Huo Dan put his hands together: "Master Jiang, Eunuch Zhu, I am a servant from the Marquis's manor, I was sent by the order of our Royal Highness to give this to the Marquis."

With that, he brought up a formal attire with a suit of armor with both hands.

Jiang Chong was startled — he could tell that *Yan Bei Wang* was a meticulous person at first sight, but being careful to this extent?

Who was the Prince being on guard against?

Gu Yun was bored to death in the dungeon, swinging the fat mouse with its tail. Noticing the unusual flow of wind behind him, he looked back in some surprise and could vaguely see three figures coming in from the outside. The person leading walked as swiftly as the wind and seemed to be still wearing a formal attire.

Then, the door of the prison was unlocked wide open, and a special palace fragrance penetrated Gu Yun's nose, dyed with the special sandalwood fragrance on Li Feng's body.

Gu Yun narrowed his eyes and recognized that the tall man was Zhu Little Feet.

If he was to be questioned, there was absolutely no reason to send Zhu Little Feet directly. The type of people like Li Feng would absolutely not slap himself in the face as such either - arrested then released, released then arrested - thus this could only mean one thing...

The smile on Gu Yun's face disappeared, he thought to himself: "What has happened?"

Jiang Chong said something quickly, Gu Yun wasn't able to hear

it at all. He could only catch a few words; 'Enemy attack...Zhao... '. Not understanding anything, he had no choice but to blindly pretend to be steady while a mountain collapsed. Remaining unchanged, he nodded.

Jiang Chong was affected by his immovable calmness, for a moment, he could also feel very stable. His anxiety that was sometimes hot sometimes cold all fell into his abdomen, his tears almost fell down. "It is indeed a blessing for all the people that there are pillars like the Marquis in Great Liang."

Gu Yun was puzzled, thinking to himself: *"My mother, what is he saying again?"*

On the surface, he only patted Master Jiang on the shoulder and said, "Lead the way."

Fortunately, Huo Dan took a step forward and handed him the formal attire, then took down the wine bottle from his waist: "His Highness asked me to bring this for the Marquis to disperse the cold."

Gu Yun opened the lid and could instantly tell from the scent that it was medicine. He was immediately relieved as if he had just been given amnesty and drank it all at once.

Huo Dan helped him change his clothes. For better or worse, this was much neater and tidy. The blinded Marquis had no choice but to go with the group to the palace. For the first time, he greatly looked forward to the quick effect of the medicine.

It was not until they reached the bottom of the palace wall that Gu Yun's ears felt as if they were being pricked by needles and slowly recovered.

He made a silent gesture to Huo Dan. Huo Dan instantly understood. He came close to his ear and repeated Jiang Chong's exact words from the dungeon.

Gu Yun hadn't listened to everything, yet his head that was aching enough to break had already snapped like a tightened bowstring. In front of his eyes were thousands of stars, his footsteps

staggered in the state of panic. Huo Dan quickly held his arm: "Marshal!"

Jiang Chong was frightened. He did not know what happened to the Marquis of Order who just now was still as calm as ever, seeing that Gu Yun's complexion was as unsightly as a dead man's, he asked nervously, "Marquis sir, what's wrong?"

'The Black Iron Camp was damaged more than half.', 'Consecutive major gates of the Northern Frontier were defeated.', 'General Zhao had sacrificed for the country.' and *'Southwest supply storage was bombed heavily.'*...these few sentences turned into a cluster of deadly blades and spiraled into all of Gu Yun's limbs and body, his chest throbbed in pain, a mouthful of sour fluid rushed up his throat.

Blue veins were visible on his temple, cold sweat dripped down, although Jiang Chong knew that even in prison, no one would dare to torture the Marquis, he was still frightened: "What's the matter? Do you need me to call for a carriage for you? Where is the doctor?"

Gu Yun's body shook slightly.

Jiang Chong: "Right now the safety of all Great Liang lies on the Marquis's shoulder, you must be strong!"

This sentence struck by Gu Yun's ear as if they were thunder. His soul that was scattered to pieces all over the country was gathered together again inside his spine, he closed his eyes and forced himself to swallow down a mouthful of blood.

After a pause, under the intense gaze filled with fear and trepidation of Jiang Chong, he laughed hoarsely as if nothing had happened. "I haven't seen the sun for a few days, my head hurt a bit - It's nothing, just an old problem."

With that, Gu Yun lowered his head and slightly adjusted his Light Armor. He pulled his arm out of Huo Dan's hand, threw the grey-haired mouse that had been nestled in his hand, and instructed him, "This is my brother mouse. Find him something to eat. Don't let him starve to death."

Huo Dan: "..."

As Gu Yun finished, he turned and walked into the palace.

At this time, in Jin Luan Hall, Chang Geng's few words had led to a chaotic battle of words up until Zhu Little Feet raised his voice to announce: "The Marquis had entered the palace to greet the Emperor" that everyone instantly quieted down. For a moment, the main hall was engulfed in dead silence.

Gu Yun caught Chang Geng's eyes as soon as he raised his head. The instant their gazes met, he could already see in Chang Geng's eyes the raging storm that a thousand words could not describe even one of them.

As if there was nobody else surrounding him, Gu Yun then stepped forward to pay regard, appearing as casual as if he did not arrive from the prison but had just taken a day nap from his home.

Li Feng immediately announced the court to dismiss and drove out the loud-mouthed and the quarreling good-for-nothing bunch, keeping only Gu Yun, Chang Geng and a group of generals to discuss the adjustment for the capital's defense throughout the night.

Master Feng Han who was reflecting on his actions behind closed door could not afford to not show himself. Ling Shu Institute was ablaze with lights, working overtime to maintain the war equipment they had left in the capital.

All day and all night, until another fourth period of the night watch* had passed, the horizon was cast in white, only then did Li Feng who had deep black circles under his eyes let them go back.

**From 1:00AM to 3:00AM*

Before leaving, Li Feng called Gu Yun alone.

In the hall, all servants on the left and the right were dismissed.

Only one ruler and one subject faced each other. Li Feng was silent for a long time, until the palace lamp sensed the sunshine and automatically distinguished it with a click, Li Feng came back to his senses, looking at Gu Yun with a complicated expression, he vaguely said: "...Uncle have had to endure injustice."

Gu Yun already had a head full of empty courteous words, even without thinking, they could be blurted out with practiced ease.

Such lies as '*Thunderstorm or rain, are all grace from the Ruler*' and '*To be able to sacrifice for the country, there would be no grievances*' have lined up in a row, closely linked together under his flexible mouth.

Suddenly, however, his tongue seemed to had stiffened. No matter how much he tried, no words could come out. He could only lift his lips in a smile towards Emperor Long An.

It was indescribably rigid and somewhat unnatural.

For a long while, the two truly had nothing to say. Li Feng sighed and waved his hand.

Gu Yun lowered his eyes and turned to leave.

Chapter 59: Battle Head-on

—

*...die for this home countr*y.

—

When Gu Yun came out of the hall, his eyes were slightly groggy. He stood still and gasped for a few breaths. For the first time in his life, he felt that the Light Armor of five kilograms was this heavy on his body.

In critical situations, the strength of a person could perhaps become infinite. Withstanding the headache that was difficult to endure even with acupuncture and a proper bed, busying himself for an entire day and night, before he could feel anything, it had already passed by.

Just now there was still a ray of sunshine in the sky, but they were now quickly covered by dark clouds in a blink of an eye. The morning light had faded.

Chang Geng stood waiting for him at the gate, his back facing the golden hall with many layers resembling a fairy palace, the coats of Yan Bei Wang's formal attire flowing in the wind. He was staring at the direction of Qi Yuan tower from afar, there was no telling what he was thinking.

Hearing footsteps, Chang Geng turned around. As he glanced at Gu Yun's face, he frowned and said, "The carriage is waiting outside. You should go rest a bit."

Gu Yun was already too exhausted, only making a sound in response.

Chang Geng: “What did that person keep you behind to talk about?”

Gu Yun replied with indifference, “Nonsense… needless words.”

Early in the morning, countless orders were sent down, and all six local branches had to follow suit. They all knew that this might be the only time left for adjustments and resting.

As soon as Gu Yun entered the room, his knees instantly turned soft, he staggered and fell over on the bed.

The armor on his body had yet to be unloaded, collapsing down with a loud bang. Half of his body felt numb, the ceiling was spinning in front of his eyes. Gu Yun had an illusion that he could never get up again.

Chang Geng put his hand on his pulse, and the usually cold hands on both sides were terribly hot as if he had just fished them out of a brazier: "Yifu, when did you start having a fever, did you know of this?"

Gu Yun moaned softly, exhaustion leaking from the cracks on his bones, his eyelids were too heavy to stay open. He struggled to ask, "Is my little mouse brother still alive?"

Chang Geng: "... Who?"

Huo Dan hurriedly follow after, taking out the little gray mouse from inside his chest, the creature was twisting about happily: "Marshal, it is alive and well."

"Then I'm all right as well," Gu Yun muttered, leaning on his elbow to climb up on his own, letting a few people circling around him to take off his armors. Feeling slightly more comfortable, he carelessly swept away the sweat-soaked hair sticking onto his face: "Either if it was a cold or it was a fever, it will pass after taking the medicine and sweating it out."

Huo Dan did not know the whole story, standing on the side wondering why had their Marquis decided to live and die together with a grey-haired mouse. But Chang Geng understood, his eyes glinting. He pressed Gu Yun onto the bed, not letting him move about: "Leave everything to me."

**For anyone who didn't understand, he fed and kept the mouse as a*

cautionary measure
in case someone poisoned him while he was in prison.

He motioned for Huo Dan to step down first, and began to pull off Gu Yun's clothes that were wet enough to wring out water. Gu Yun's body was soft, and he would feel dizzy as soon as he opened his eyes. He had no choice but to close his eyes and lean aside, letting him do whatever. His breathing was a little erratic, making him appear somewhat weak.

Chang Geng's hand shook as soon as his outer and middle garments were removed.

Gu Yun's thin undergarment was already soaked through with sweat, resembling a layer of garlic skin. Nothing could be hidden. His chest and waistline that should have been covered became all the more exposed. Somehow, Chang Geng felt that this was even more fatal than the last time when Gu Yun jumped directly into the hot spring in front of him.

Chang Geng's heart beat like thunder for a moment. He dared not take anything off anymore. He pulled a quilt over and wrapped it around Gu Yun, taking out a set of clean clothes and putting it next to him. He whispered with a pleading tone: "Yifu, would you mind changing the rest by yourself?"

Gu Yun did not fall ill often after becoming an adult, but once in a while as it happened, it always seemed to be especially serious. Smoke emitting from his seven orifices, his ears were ringing. He waved his hand powerlessly at Chang Geng, complaining, "When is it already? You really..."

Chang Geng stood aside, averting his gaze. His embarrassment caused Gu Yun to feel uncomfortable himself. They were silent for a moment, Chang Geng then awkwardly said, "I'll go make the medicine for you."

He turned around and left, eventually giving both men a little relief.

After Gu Yun had laid down for a while, his thoughts were quickly stirred by the high fever into a pot of porridge, everything was poured into the mix. On one hand, he thought, *"What on earth should I do with this kid Chang Geng?"*

On the other, he thought, *"The Black Iron Camp retreated to Jiayu Gate, the brothers who had lost their lives have no one there to collect their bodies even if they were wrapped in only a piece of horse leather."*

After a while of thinking, his heart seemed to have a hole. Every single miserable wind and bitter rain drilled into it. The pain that was suppressed back by Jiang Chong's words on his way returned and became much worse, making him pained to the point of no longer wanting to live.

Half of the 50,000 iron armors was lost overnight.

Finally, Gu Yun's consciousness gradually blurred. Rather than falling asleep, in fact, it could be said that he had fainted, falling into unconsciousness then regaining consciousness alternatively. Many things from the past and the present became a mess, falling down onto him, old memories resembling floating shadows sweeping by.

He remembered his childhood years, when he was neither deaf nor blind, when he was like a flea that could never be laid down regardless of how much he was disciplined, and the Old Marquis would always glare angrily whenever he saw him.

On one rare occasion, however, the Old Marquis had patiently led him to see the sunset outside the fortress.

The Old Marquis was tall and dignified, even with a child only as large as a bun, he still treated him with equality. He refused to carry

him and only led him by holding his hand - coming from the Old Marquis, this could already be considered a rare display of affection. In this way, the adult had to bend over, the child had to stretch their arm, no one could be comfortable.

However, Gu Yun did not complain. It was the first time he saw the blood-hue sunset in the desert of the border city. The figure of a Black Eagle flew by from time to time, like a golden crow dragging a white rainbow, everywhere were the vast yellow sand, flat forest and desert, the young Gu Yun was almost shocked.

They watched the vast red sun sink into the ground. Gu Yun can hear the Old Marquis expressing towards the deputy general beside him: "For a general, to be able to die for the home country, that would be great luck."

He did not understand at the time, but now, twenty years have passed.

"Marshal," Gu Yun thought: *"Perhaps I… truly will die for this home country."*

...Like a foal in a gap, fire in a stone, a body in a dream.

At this time, someone pushed the door in, held Gu Yun up and fed him a bowl of water. The other person truly was incredibly gentle, as if he was long used to taking care of other people, not letting even one drop to spill.

Then he lowered his voice and coaxed in Gu Yun's ear, "Zi Xi, drink the medicine then sleep again."

Gu Yun did not open his eyes, hazily answering: "Half an hour...wake me up in half an hour later, if I could not get up, splash a bowl of cold water on me."

Chang Geng sighed, silently fed him medicine, then watched over him at his side.

Gu Yun seemed to be uncomfortable, tossing and turning, the quilt was almost kicked away by him. Chang Geng tried to cover him several times, then, in the end, he simply wrapped it around and held

him in his arms.

It was strange. Perhaps due to how Gu Yun was never particularly close to anyone since childhood, right now as he could feel himself leaning against someone behind him, he instantly laid still. The person holding him carefully adjusted him to the most comfortable posture. Miss Chen's tranquilizer filled his every breath, one hand brushed by his forehead, the fingers pressing at the back of his neck, his shoulder, and forehead repeatedly with enough strength, neither too strong nor too light.

Gu Yun hadn't slept in such a comfortable ‘bed’ in his life. In a blink of an eye, he could no longer tell what night it is.

Peaceful time flowed as swiftly as running water. Half an hour quickly went by.

Chang Geng glanced at the clock next to him and was very reluctant. He did not have the heart to let go, nor to wake him up.

But there was no other choice. The war disaster was imminent. Casting one sight at this entire world, where else could he be able to have a peaceful sleep?

Chang Geng tried his best to will himself and tap Gu Yun on his acupoint, waking him up on time and went to the kitchen by himself.

Gu Yun's heart was continuously tense, with a bowl of medicine and a body full of sweat, the sickness had been pushed back. After half an hour of rest, when he woke up again, the fever had almost disappeared. He stayed in bed for a while then put on his clothes, feeling that he had come back to life.

His body felt better, his heart had also become much more relaxed.

Gu Yun thought, *"Aren't they just a group of foreigners? If they are so extraordinary, why must they play devious tricks?"*

Even if it was any worse, as long as he was still alive, as long as Gu family still had someone left, the Black Iron Camp still could not be counted as being destroyed entirely.

Gu Yun let out a long exhale. Only now did he realize he was starving to death. He pressed his stomach and painfully thought, *"Whoever gives me two hot pancakes at this moment, I will marry* that person immediately."*

**The term used here was*
“take someone home as a wife”,
since there is another term
for a wife to be “wedded to”
someone else's home.

Just as he was thinking this, Chang Geng came in with a bowl of hot noodle soup. Hot steam and delicious fragrance rushed forward without hesitation. Gu Yun's organs had been starved to the point of twisting itself together.

He swallowed his own words: *"Except for this person, this one does not count..."*

Unexpectedly, as soon as this thought began, there was a sudden roar of thunder outside.

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng reached for his forehead to check his temperature and said, "Your fever had gone down, yifu come eat something first."

Gu Yun silently took the chopsticks, as he heard the word ‘yifu’, he could vaguely feel something was strange. Unfortunately, this idea passed by in a flash, he was not able to catch it.

Gu Yun: "Did you cook this?"

"In a hurry, there's only time to make one bowl of noodle.” Chang Geng replied with his expression unchanging. “Is it alright?”

Gu Yun was feeling uncomfortable all over, he did not understand what *Yan Bei Wang* was doing, making himself so virtuous*.

**The word used here was a term*
used to describe women or wives
who are skilled in household matter
such as cooking, sewing, etc..

Chang Geng seemed to know what he was thinking, he calmly said, "If the country was lost, just push Li Feng aside. I can go open a noodle shop in the northwest, it will be enough to make a living."

Gu Yun was choked by a mouthful of noodle broth, coughing to hell and back.

Chang Geng laughed and said, "I was only joking."

Gu Yun took the cup of cold herbal tea and downed it: "Good boy, knowing how to use me for entertainment already, truly getting worse and worse."

Chang Geng said with a serious expression, "When you suddenly want to bring me back to the capital from Yanhui town that year, I had wanted to run, I had thought about either being a hunter in the deep mountains, or opening a puny shop in a small border area to make enough living to pass the day. But later as I felt that I was unlikely to be able to slip away from your eyes, I have instantly become obedient."

Gu Yun pushed aside the vegetables, picked out the smoked pork under the bowl and ate them all. Before he could thoroughly chew it, Chang Geng suddenly leaned back on the chair and spoke with a long sigh of relief, "Yifu, you don't know, as long as you don't appear in front of me safe and sound for a day, I will not dare to close my eyes to rest for a day, and finally..."

Gu Yun said lightly, "I am still a hundred and eighty thousand miles from safe and sound — tell me everything."

Chang Geng understood he was referring to things that he had

not spoken of in front of Li Feng.

Gu Yun: "The Black Iron Camp must have been withdrawn by you. Otherwise, He Rong Hui would have fought until the last man."

"I imitated your handwriting." Chang Geng said, "Take the Black Iron Camp back to Jiayu Gate and let General Cai go north to aid the frontier. Calculating the time, General He must have already received the emergency supply of *Ziliujin*. This needn't be known to Li Feng, he intended to abolish the Drumming Order anyway."

Gu Yun blinked: "You imitated..."

"They're all underhanded tricks." Chang Geng shook his head. "I had sent a letter to Teacher on the southern of Jiangnan, but it was still too late. Besides, I suspected that there were spies left behind by the barbarians twenty years ago in the palace, I have already asked someone to investigate, and there was still no news from General Shen, I'm afraid there would be no good news."

"No news is the best news," Gu Yun said after a moment's silence. "That old maid has great fortune, he won't die."

Chang Geng: "Yifu, the enemies on the northwest side are coming fiercely, but now it seems that there will be nothing wrong for a while. According to you, after the disaster of the Eastern Sea, will we be able to defend the capital?"

Gu Yun looked up at him. His eyes were like a pair of flints — they were cold, hard and indescribable, appearing as if they could ignite into countless sparks with only a touch.

There were only himself and Chang Geng in the room, separated by a bowl of noodles. Gu Yun did not speak empty words and said frankly: "It depends on whether we can support ourselves until the reinforcements arrive. Coming from a thousand miles away to launch a surprise attack, the foreigners must also want a quick victory, otherwise, they won't make such a grand opening. The longer it dragged on, the more advantageous it would be for us, but…"

But the resources of Great Liang cannot sustain a prolonged war.

The reason Li Feng turned mad and desperately wanted to possess the *Ziliujin* mine in Lou Lan was because in this place with the most abundance of wealth in the world, there were very little *Ziliujin* mines. The supply was insufficient for the necessity. Nearly 40 percent of the *Ziliujin* in Great Liang came from the tribute of the Eighteen Tribes, another large part were bought from various sources outside. The money flowing in by sea trade flowed out again all the same.

At present, the Eighteen Tribes had rebelled, they were besieged from all directions. The only source left to mobilize was from their own stock. In the long run, they would inevitably be unable to make ends meet.

This was only the matter of *Ziliujin*, let alone the treasury that was even more frail than a wildflower, where could they find so much money?

Gu Yun: "Just as you said, in case it does not work out in the end, we will shrink our forces and slowly come up with a plan. That is the most rational solution. But it may not turn out the way we want."

"It was alright for the Black Iron Camp to retreat to Jiayu gate. Although it is usually bustling outside the gate, most of the people are merchants settling down temporarily. The Silk Road has just been opened for several years, it was not enough for them to stay permanently, moreover, the situation there has tensed up near the end of the year, once the passage is closed, no business can be done. It is estimated that they have all left already."

"But it is not possible within the gate. There are thousands of villages and hundreds of millions of civilian still inside. Even if He Rong Hui were to perish, he cannot retreat any further."

The Black Iron Camp was the belief of the people and even the pillar of Great Liang. Once this pillar collapsed, there was no need to battle any longer. It was faster for the nation to change its name directly.

Chang Geng was silent for a long moment. "What I said was a

last resort."

"No last resort." Gu Yun shook his head. "You have talents. You know how to manage the country, but you have never fought in a war. Aside from favorable weather and geographical conditions, there are two more points: one is the equipment of steel armors and machines, the other is the courage of the human heart."

"For equipment, it has already come to this, there is no other option... but I believe that for the foreigners, even if they are strong, they are not much better than us, let alone those country bumkins barbarians. Even if someone handed them an explosive, they would still use it like a stick."

"Subordinates are not chess pieces, they are all human beings, they can be courageous, but there is no one who doesn't fear death. Do you remember what I said to you last time we suppressed the bandits in the southwest?"

Chang Geng: "I do. On the battlefield, who doesn't want to die, will die first'."

Gu Yun made an *'Mm'* sound. Even when the country was in danger, it still could not delay his meal. In a few words, a bowl of noodles had been eaten to the bottom. He finally pinched his nose, drinking the rest of the damn green vegetables mixed in the broth. He did not bother to chew either and put the bowl on the table: "Is there more?"

"No, I only have enough to make one bowl. You just recovered from sickness. The spleen and stomach are still weak. It's best to be only partially full." Chang Geng said. "How to fight, you have the final say. There is no need for you to worry about the future, no need to worry about what the others might think, how to make money, how to find *Ziliujin*, how to manage the layout, you can leave all of these matters to me."

Gu Yun was a little shocked. He laughed and said, "Do I have the final say for everything? What if I can't win?"

Chang Geng laughed but did not say more. His eyes were fixed

on him, resembling a pool of quiet water suddenly started rippling. If his eyes could speak, then the words: *"If you lose, I will accompany you in bearing the disgrace for thousands of years. If you die, I will follow you into the grave."* were clearly expressed.

At that moment, Huo Dan suddenly knocked on the door lightly: “Marshal, Master Feng Han had come with General Tan, they also brought along the battle report from the Eastern Sea."

Gu Yun quickly said, "Please come in!"

Chang Geng retracted his gaze and tidied up his chopsticks. As he bowed his head, he suddenly said, "Just now, one of my sentences was a lie."

Gu Yun was stunned.

"I said that year, the reason why I didn't leave was because I could not escape from your eyes." Chang Geng laughed, not lifting his head, "That year, I was just a frontier boy who grew up in a tiny place, I generally could not think so much.."

Gu Yun was keenly aware of his implications, "Chang Geng, don't say any more."

Chang Geng closed his mouth obediently, swallowing back his next words.

At that time, he could not think so much. The reason why he didn't escape, in the end, was because he was not able to let go of one person.

Tan Hong Fei and Zhang Feng Han came in very quickly. When the battle report of the Eastern Sea was presented to Gu Yun, Tan Hong Fei's hand was still shaking slightly. Gu Yun's heart sank.

"Marshal, Jiangnan’s side had come to report, our navy in a thousand miles had collapsed. The Westerners have gone north, there

was no telling what type of Dragons they were using, they move as fast as lightning, clashing with two to three of our navy boat, even circling around a large sea monster in the middle." Tan Hong Fei said, "If this is the truth, then they will go north to Da Gu Harbor, it will only take about two or three more days to arrive!"

Chapter 60: Artillery Fire

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Without the commander's order, the Black Iron Camp dared not retreat for even one step.

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Chang Geng took over the report, Gu Yun asked, "How many naval troops are left in Jiangnan?"

"Hard to say," Chang Geng swept across it quickly. "Our Dragons had never crossed the sea, let alone fight at sea. Zhao You Fang's death had plunged them into a panic, people were fleeing in all directions. Yifu, do you remember when *Wei Wang* rioted?"

Gu Yun pinched the bridge of his nose, understanding what he meant.

That year, *Wei Wang* bought the Jiangnan Navy commander and half of the naval force. Unexpectedly, Gu Yun and Lin Yuan Pavilion had joined forces together to stir it up before he was ready.

'Gu Yun and Lin Yuan Pavilion's joint efforts', in fact, that year by Gu Yun's side were a few Black Eagles and young children, Lin Yuan Pavilion was only an organization comprised of thirty people from the pugilist world, including that useless Liao Ran who could put on Heavy Armor but could not take it off.

Gu Yun had great influence in the army from his prestige throughout the years. His sudden appearance that had frightened the rebels who were guilty was one of the reasons, but this also proved that Great Liang's Navy was indeed a crippled leg.

Even a rebellion could not be carried out properly.

If this had happened under the reign of Emperor Yuan He, Gu Yun might have had the opportunity to intervene in the Navy just as he did in rectifying the city defense forces in the Northern Frontier. Unfortunately, Li Feng was not the soft-hearted kind similar to

Emperor Yuan He and was indecisive in killing a few people. That kind of thing could never happen in the years of Long An.

Gu Yun: "What about Yao Chong Ze? Was he also dead?"

Chang Geng: “There was no mention, there are too many casualties.”

Gu Yun sighed, "And what is a ‘sea monster’?"

Chang Geng: "It is said that it resembles a large octopus and can lurk under the water. It's like a mountain when coming out of the surface, covering the sky. Compared with it, the Giant Kite is similar to a pigeon landing on the shoulder of a warrior. It has numerous iron claws on its body, connected to thousands of small Sea Dragons, and when the top opened up, it can release large groups of Eagle armor..."

When Chang Geng said this, he paused slightly, his slender fingers lightly rubbing the report: "If such a thing exists, at least four or five hundred kilograms of *Ziliujin* are required to be burned daily."

Gu Yun looked at him, Chang Geng shook his head slightly, he did not say more. The second half of the sentence was hidden — *the Westerners paid such a heavy price, I'm afraid they did not come to fight a prolonged war with us.*

"Having dealt with the navy in Jiangnan, there is no worries left on the sea, Da Gu Port Navy is not their opponent, the next step is to press directly to the capital," Gu Yun took down the map on the wall, "Old Tan, how many troops can be deployed in the capital?"

Tan Hong Fei licked his dry and cracked lips: "There are two thousand Heavy Armors in the Northern Camp, 16,000 Light Cavalry, and two thousand chariots and horsemen. There are eighty chariots in total with three pairs of *baihong* on each of them, each with a long and short artillery at the head and tail."

This meager forces were only enough to force the Emperor to abdicate, clashing with the Westerner using all that they’ve got accumulated and planned for many years was much like a pinch of

salt in an ocean, Gu Yun frowned: "What about the Imperial Army?"

"The Imperial Army is no good. There are less than 6,000 people in total. More than half of them are the young master type with only appearance, they have never seen blood." Tan Hong Fei paused for a moment then suddenly remembered something. He took an object out of his chest and solemnly held it in both hands and gave it to Gu Yun. "That's right, the Emperor had asked me to bring this to Marshal."

The thing was wrapped in fine palace silk, one would originally assume it was some kind of precious jewelry, only to find a ferocious-looking Black Iron Tiger emblem inside.

Gu Yun glanced at it then lifted his lips in an unamused smile. "What good would it do giving this back to me now? The flower had already withered."

Tan Hong Fei did not know what to say.

Gu Yun casually threw the Black Tiger Emblem to Tan Hong Fei: "Alright, since the Emperor has made up his mind, you can go write the orders according to his wishes. Summon the local garrisons in Zhili, Shandong Province to return for defense, aid the difficulties in the capital, let Cai Feng divide his force to lead the reinforcement... Well, just summon them for now, if they do not come then we will think of something later."

Tan Hong Fei: "..."

On the other hand, Zhang Feng Han at their side was already of old age and frail, he could not be so stone-hearted as these animals at the same table. He had been frightened from the start until now, as he suddenly heard Gu Yun's implication, the Old Ling Shu immediately turned pale, he could not refrain from asking: "Does Marshal mean...It is possible that the Qin Wang army won't be able to arrive?"

Chang Geng answered, "If the information in the battle report is correct, the Westerners can't carry too much supply with them — they can't afford to fight either. If they want to deliver a fatal strike,

coming from Jiangnan, they must divide their forces into two ways. They will press on to the capital from the sea route, cut off the passageway from the capital to the four sides and besiege us... I'm afraid the summoning order will not be able to pass to the outside anymore."

Master Feng Han almost fainted on the spot, he fell down on the chair, breathing heavily.

Chang Geng did not expect such a strong reaction from him. He immediately poured a cup of water and brought it in front of Master Feng Han. He skillfully patted several acupoint at his back and said, "Please stay calm. Older people should try not to be overly joyful or overly sorrowful, otherwise it will easily lead to a stroke..."

Zhang Feng Han grabbed his hand and almost burst into tears: "My Royal Highness, do you not know what anxiousness is?"

"Master Feng Han rest assured, I haven't finished yet," Chang Geng hurriedly said: "When yifu was imprisoned, fearing that there might be changes at the border, I had already contacted some friends."

As he said this, he took a wooden bird out of his sleeve.

"This kind of wooden bird needs a special kind of magnet to lead the way, which can be used to communicate with other people who held magnets. They had received my letters and should have already departed for the major garrisons separately, I hope they will arrive in time."

"If the capital city truly fall under siege, I can use wooden birds to communicate this information to them and let them spread the news on our behalf. With the Black Tiger Emblem and my yifu's private seal, it should be enough to gain trust."

When Chang Geng realized that the long communication between different places would delay the war news, he had began to make use of Lin Yuan Pavilion to set up a massive communication network ready for the near future.

Tan Hong Fei and Zhang Feng Han stared at Chang Geng with their mouths agape.

"It's only a small trick. Under such urgency, I can't think of any other way " Chang Geng said, "It can be used for emergencies at the present when it is still unknown to the enemy, but it cannot continue on in the long run. Once the enemy is aware of it, it will no longer be safe. Any small stone can easily shoot it down."

Gu Yun could not describe how he was feeling for a moment. When he was in prison, it was not as if he wasn't worried about Chang Geng. But at the present, it seemed that even if it was he himself who managed it at that time, it couldn't be said for certain that he could do a better job than Chang Geng.

Not only did he managed to preserve half of the Black Iron Camp, he also left them with a way out.

While he was grateful and touched, he also felt that the teenager who would only shut his eyes and retreat in front of the sword training puppet that year should not have grown up so quickly, this was all because he did not take good care of him.

But in front of outsiders, Gu Yun could not express any emotion, he only said lightly: "Your Highness arranged everything very well."

"Let us go, Old Tan, follow me to the northern camp." Gu Yun took off the wine bottle hanging behind the door and looked at the sky. He did not even wear his armor. He picked up a coat and strode away.

Chang Geng also stood up: "Yifu, go on ahead first, I will return to Ling Shu Institute with Master Feng Han to calculate and escort the supply to you."

The temporary warmth and ambiguous caring had disappeared. The two went on their separate ways, leaving in a hurry.

Gu Yun was right in taking only a coat. Just halfway down the road, the continuous thunder on the horizon suddenly transformed into a lightning as bright as snow, flashing in the air, splitting across the gloomy sky, a rare heavy rain splashing down.

Water strongly pouring, wind and rain covered the way.

Gu Yun and Tan Hong Fei took with them a group of guards and hurried out of the city heading towards the northern camp. Tan Hong Fei was gasping for breath due to the rain. He strongly wiped away the droplets on his face, remembered that back at the manor when he was requesting for an audience, Huo Dan had told him the Marquis was ill. He could not help but usher his horse over to Gu Yun and shouted, "The rain is too heavy, Marshal, you still have a cold. We should better find a place to hide and wait for the rain to stop..."

Gu Yun shouted: "Look at the cloud, who knows what day or year it would stop, don't talk nonsense!"

Perhaps this heavy rain came too suddenly and out of nowhere. Gu Yun had an ominous feeling in his heart.

The Black Iron Camp was called the ‘black crow’ by the foreigners. As the head of the black crow, Gu Yun indeed has an unprecedented crow's mouth. Almost all of his forebodings would come true without fail.

Gu Yun quickly took over the chaotic northern camp, at the same time, Chang Geng had escorted over the armors and machines that Ling Shu Institute had accumulated by scrapping all that they have left. Among them, there were a number of Black Eagle suits and Heavy Armors.

Tan Hong Fei estimated that the Westerners would go north in two or three days — in reality, he had been too optimistic.

That night, on a watchtower in Da Gu Harbor.

In front of the *Qian Li Yan* were two dust-proof brushes as large as a palm, struggling to move up and down in vain. Not long after, the wind and rain had beaten them down.

The old tower soldier on duty had to put his hand out the window and grab a rusty handle nearby where the fire engine had been busted for a long time, but no one had repaired it, thus it had to be pulled manually.

He shook away the rain droplets on his hands and strongly twisted the handle, the half-dead gears that had cracked and chipped made a screeching sound. A metal umbrella rose slowly and unfolded, covering the front mirror of the *Qian Li Yan* in the miserable wind and bitter rain.

The old soldier wiped the water vapor on the glasses of the *Qian Li Yan* and complained to his companions: "We are all serving as soldiers, but the other people can fly high in heaven, conquering the wind and clouds, mighty as hell. We are just the opposite, every day on the tower, if it was not sweeping the floor then it was playing cards. It's even more peaceful compared to the monks."

"Can't even get our hands on some benefits, all throughout the day there is not a goddamn thing to do, but we also had to spent time here all the year round. Even the wives would forget our faces already ... hey, how strange, why is it raining so hard? Where did this massive grievance came from?"

His companion that was sweeping the floor did not even raise his head: "You better pray nothing would happen, Didn't you hear? Captain said that the Westerners are about to get here already, you'll have something to do then."

"Don't listen to the Captain's gibberish. Doesn't he always go on about how the Westerners would arrive in a few days?" The guard said, "Isn't the Marquis of Order still keeping guard right next to the capital?"

"The Marquis has been put into prison."

"Gee, didn't he get released already?..." As the old soldier said

this, as if he had remembered something, he said again: "Yes, it is very strange. Aren't there rumors about how the Marquis led forces to the capital to force the Emperor to abdicate? How could he be released so quickly, perhaps..."

"Shh," his companion suddenly raised his head abruptly. "Stop talking nonsense, listen!"

A thunder-like ‘rumble’ came faintly from the wind, the watchtower seemed to sense something and started to tremble.

Thunder?

No, thunder rang out one after another, how could it drag on continuously like this?

The old soldier ran to the *Qian Li Yan* and quickly pushed the lens upwards. The moment his gaze passed through the dark curtain of rain, he suddenly caught sight of a huge shadow out at sea.

A monster such as this one does not exist even in nightmares, with its claws flying up to the sky, growling loudly and angrily and in a low voice.

The soldier thought there was problem with his eyes, rubbing them hard then taking another look, only to find that the ‘sea monster’ was moving like a flying shadow. In the blink of an eye, he could not tell how much it had advanced, but it was already near enough to see clearly from the *Qian Li Yan*.

The Black Sea Dragons swooped in fiercely in the dark night. Battle flags flew in the wind and rain resembling an ominous beacon, their shadows covered the vast ocean.

"Enemy attack..." The old soldier struggled to open his mouth.

"What?"

The old soldier suddenly turned back and roared, "Enemy attack! The Westerners are coming, ring the bells and beat the drum! What are you are standing there for, go quickly —"

The sound of drums penetrated through the rainstorm, the light on the watchtower that was originally turning slowly suddenly accelerated and began to whirl wildly, one alerting ten, ten alerting a hundred. In a few breathing intervals, all the watchtowers in Da Gu Harbor had sounded their drums.

Lian Wei, the commander of the Northern Sea Navy, had never once dared to close his eyes to rest since the day he received the news of the defeat in the Southern Sea. Right now his heart was beating like mad inside his chest. He grabbed the *Qian Li Yan* in the hands of his guard.

After only one look, he was forced to cry out, "My gods," from his chest to his back, all had turned chill.

"General, what should we do?"

"All..." Lian Wei's throat moved. "Large Dragons go ahead, no need to say hello, fire the Heavy Artillery instantly... Wait, put on the metal chain, that's right, all Dragons go side by side! Form a fence of metal chain outside the port!"

"Set up the *baihong*—"

"Notify the fishing and merchant ships in the port to evacuate immediately!"

Lian Wei looked down at the 'Feng Huo* Order' on his table that had not yet been put away — it was the highest level of warfare warning in Great Liang. Once the 'Feng Huo Order' was received, it indicated that the whole territory will enter a ready state for war at any moment.

*烽火, *lit. beacon fire*

On the Feng Huo Order was a letter 'Gu', signed by the Marquis of Order himself.

That year, when the Black Iron Camp was attacked in the Northern Frontier, more than ten generals big and small had to take off their Black Armor, lay down their Wind Slasher, was scattered all over the country, some retired, some hid away.

Lian Wei had thought that he would be trapped here in a small harbor all his life, every day idly taking people around the port for patrol. Sometimes, he would interfere with trivial matters such as fishermen gathering to gamble and fight.

Even when he was shocked to hear about how the Northern Camp had raised up because of what happened that year, he did not have the courage to stand up like Tan Hong Fei to demand justice.

"Notify the Northern Camp," Lian Wei tightened his armor, took a deep breath and pulled back his bulging stomach. "Notify the Marquis of Order, Da Gu Harbor was attacked by the Western Navy, hurry!"

As Lian Wei stepped out, he remembered something. He turned back to pick up the Wind Slasher which had been standing in the corner covered in dust for many years. He lightly caressed it, then carried it on his back.

The Wind Slasher slaying through golden sand in the past had rusted so much that even the small component for storing *Ziliujin* could no longer be opened. It has become a heavy black iron rod, there were no other use aside for robbing the road in the middle of the night.

However, when he carried it on his back again, he suddenly recovered the feeling that the Black Armor was on his body and looked at himself like no other.

Years of sinking away, yet the snow blade and steel armor branded into his bone and blood still never once faded.

The large Dragons' iron fence and the sea monster confronted each other, directly clashing face to face. The Western warships resembled demons and ghosts in the midst of wind and rain. The fierce gale at sea could not hold them back. The crazy wind and waves set off a tide that seemed to engulf the mainland, artillery fires rained down continuously. Countless warships disintegrated in the blink of an eye, sinking into the billowing ocean.

"General, I'm afraid the iron fence won't be able to stop them!"

"General, too much ships had sunk on the left side, the chain..."

"Watchtower - be careful!"

A cannon artillery surged over like a flaming dragon, even the curtain of rain could not suppress its blazing fire, hitting a watchtower with a loud explosive sound. The tower staggered, slowly collapsing from the middle.

The light that pierced through the wind and rain on the top of the tower went out.

Lian Wei pushed his guards aside and boarded the deck of the warship. He roared, "Do not stop the Heavy Cannons, load the explosive on the baihong bow!"

"General Lian, Da Gu Port is impossible..."

"Move!" Lian Wei pushed the small soldiers near the Baihong arrow aside, he shouted and lifted the rocket of more or less one hundred pounds, smashed it on the enormous Baihong bow. He wiped away the rain water on his face and calibrated the bow with his hands.

The first rocket was blown into the sky by the *Baihong* bow. In the air, the iron shell at the tail of the rocket fell away. The glint of *Ziliujin* resembling an impenetrable flaming torch, boosting the speed of the rocket, passing by like a meteor, grazing the flag of the sea monster and falling into the water nearby.

The flying banner of the Holy See was torn into a piece of cloth by the tremendous impact, dispersed in the wind, but the momentum

of the rocket did not stop, hitting directly at a Western sea monster currently wreaking havoc, exploding into bright fireworks on the ocean.

Without the commander's order, the Black Iron Camp dared not retreat for even one step.

When the news of the attack on Da Gu Harbor arrived that night, Gu Yun was going through the capital defense with Tan Hong Fei and Han Qi — commander of the Imperial Army for the final time.

Hearing this news, Han Qi almost jumped up from his seat, he shouted. "How could it be so fast!"

Gu Yun's expression darkened: "Who is the commander of the Northern Sea Navy?"

"Lian Wei," Tan Hong Fei added a moment later, the rims of his eyes reddened, “He was a deputy of mine that year."

Gu Yun's eyes twitched slightly: “Commander Han."

Han Qi understood his intention, "Yes, this general will return to the capital immediately. You can rest assured, even if the Imperial Army only had the young master type of soldier, the only burial place for us is at the foot of the imperial capital!"

Gu Yun took a deep look at him and suddenly opened the tent: "Can those old men in Ling Shu Institute hurry up?"

Before his words were even finished, a messenger came up and said, "Grand Marshal, Yan Bei Wang had arrived!"

Gu Yun turned around, Chang Geng's horse had already came up front, he pulled the reins: "Marshal, Ling Shu Institute has repaired the existing black iron armors, 1000 Heavy Armors, 500 Eagle armors, split the Light Armor suits into pieces, three thousand pairs

of wrist buckles, four thousand pairs of iron leg guards. Another batch of four thousand pairs of shoulder guards will be sent over later."

Chapter 61: News of Victory

—

Gu Yun shouted angrily at the front, "Who allowed you to copy me, I'm about to urinate already!"

—

Tan Hong Fei who followed Gu Yun out of the marshal tent was stunned. He never dreamed that one day, he would be able to put on the Black Armor again. Suddenly, his heart that was filled with sorrow all but vanished. He felt that after this battle, even if blood was shed and heads would fall, it would all be worthwhile.

Tan Hong Fei took a step forward and said aloud, "Your subordinate is willing to be the vanguard for marshal!"

"You are indispensable. *Baihong* chariot opens the path, Light Cavalry and Black Eagle follow me, Heavy Armor crushes the battle," Gu Yun ordered, "Give me a Wind Slasher. What kind of devil, we will only know after we see them."

Chang Geng untied the long bow behind him. This was given to him by Gu Yun when they were fighting bandits in the southwest. It seemed like it was the last decent work that the Ling Shu Institute could put out after Emperor Long An began to reduce military power.

Unfortunately, the gaudy bow was so heavy that it could not be controlled at all if weren't handled by a true expert. Therefore, there was only such one made for trial in the whole army.

And it could have been popularized in the army after undergoing improvement...

Chang Geng touched the cold bow and asked, "Yifu, can I follow you?"

Gu Yun stopped. He partially did not want to take him along — not because of anything else, but through this battle, his heart had had more expectations for this newly emerging young prince. He

might be able to sacrifice himself to defend to the last step, but what would come next?

Who would clean up this broken and tattered home country? Who would break through with a way out for the thousands of families and people in this mess?

Chang Geng's way of socializing was much more thoughtful compared to himself when he was young, perhaps he would not end up like him, arguing with the Emperor to this irremediable situation...

Chang Geng seemed to know what he was thinking: "There are no unbroken eggs under an overturned nest. Now the capital is already like this. Waiting in the palace is no different from going on the front line. In case the city breaks down, isn't the only difference was to die sooner or later?"

Before Gu Yun could speak, Tan Hong Fei had laughed aloud and said, "Your Highness speaks well! The entire court had nothing but scholars, only Your Highness is a real man!"

Gu Yun could do nothing, he waved his hand and said, "You already spoke of everything. Come if you like."

He then stared at Tan Hong Fei, looking at General Tan's unhealed whiplash on his face and wanting to whip the other side and turn the man into a symmetrical pig's head.

Beyond the capital, countless Black Eagles formed into rows, as one took a glance, they could feel as if they have returned to the Crescent Spring.

Looking from the horseback, the light of Qi Yuan tower remained brightly lit even in the heavy rain, as if covered with a thin and soft veil, facing the majestic imperial city from afar. Twenty Red Kites which rose only on New Year's Eve now hung in the sky, resembling sorrowful longing eyes sending them off.

Gu Yun made a gesture with his hand. The vanguards of the Northern Camp moved quietly with neither tragic songs nor grand

speeches. They traveled in the rain, their masks and helmets without a gap made them appear much like iron puppets with no emotions.

Heavy rain floated the capital on the water, the old bluestone could serve as the witness.

That night, the Western Navy raided Da Gu Harbor up north. Lian Wei, the commander of the Northern Sea Navy, led his three hundred large Dragons and a thousand small ships to adhere to it. Firstly, the large Dragons were connected by iron chains, moving side by side and formed into a fence outside the harbor. They stood their ground until the hour of the Mouse* of the next day, all Dragons were buried under the gunfire of the sea monster, not a single one was lucky enough to make it out.

**12:00pm to 12:30pm*

The Nothern Sea Navy contained 36,000 rockets, 100,000 steel *baihong* arrows - none were left, all were sunk into the raging waves deep under the ocean.

After resources had run out, Commander Lian Wei ordered all the small ships to run at full speed. With the ships as ignition, they used themselves as *Baihong* arrows, charging into the enemy's line.

Fire floated on the sea, the soul of loyal soldiers crushed to pieces.

The Northern Sea Navy collided, sank, and bombed nearly 3,000 naval warships of the enemy. At last, it forced the sea monsters to open their iron tentacles in the midst of rain, releasing the hidden Eagle Armors inside and disembarked in a hurry from the air. They later found that there was no one left on Da Gu Harbor.

At the beginning of the hour of the Tiger*, the Westerners that landed on the shore were incredibly disheartened. Eager to make up

for their grave losses in this battle, they did not stop but went directly for the capital, meeting the Black Iron Camp on the way — the Black Iron Camp that had only been formed by Gu Yun overnight — clashing outside Dong'an City.

**3:00am*

The Western Navy who had not yet recovered from their costly landing was caught off guard. They were first under attack by 80 chariots. Light Cavalry then appeared from all directions, surrounding them. Eagles flew high in the sky, their screech as sharp as blades.

The Pope's personal guard suddenly met with the Wind Slashers and was almost scattered by the Cavalry on the spot. They hastily retreated back outside of Da Gu Harbor to reserve their troops.

Great Liang had not had such a thrilling night for so many years. Battle reports and messengers rushed to and from the palace much like a market gathering.

No one in the capital was able to sleep until the next morning, when the news of victory arrived together with the light of dawn.

Suddenly receiving the first good news after so many days, Li Feng could hardly stand up, wondering whether he should cry or laugh.

The rain had stopped, the sky was clear. Haihe River surged overnight and the air was filled with an indescribable scent, mixed with the smell of smoke and blood. The ground had warmed up and the humidity had not yet dissipated. Gu Yun had no naval force, after a long night of fierce battle, the Westerners was forced to retreat, utterly defeated.

Gu Yun sat beside the canon with its muzzle that had yet to cool down. The black iron helmet was thrown aside, his messy hair hung down in disorder. He received the medicine handed over by Chang

Geng and downed it all.

Chang Geng said, "I did not bring needles, and even if I did, I would not dare to perform it for yifu."

Pulling the string of the iron bow all night, his hands were left with a deep impression. Even now they had not recovered and continued to tremble slightly.

Gu Yun grabbed his wrist and pulled it closer to him. Seeing that he only had exerted his strength and was not injured, he waved his hand in relief: "Don't worry about me, go calculate the casualties. Old Tan won't be able to count them all."

After that, he simply leaned on the canon and closed his eyes to rest for a moment.

A moment later, Gu Yun was woken up by a messenger from the imperial capital.

The person coming was a young soldier of the imperial army. At his rank, he could hardly ever get to see Gu Yun. At last, he could meet the Marquis of Order in the flesh, he truly could not help himself with the excitement, charging over on his horse. When dismounting, there was no telling what he had tripped on, but he rolled all the way under Gu Yun's feet: "Marquis sir!"

Gu Yun shrunk his feet in a hurry: "My, what is the grand courtesy for?"

The messenger said excitedly, "Marquis sir, Your Majesty had ordered me to come and reward the Northern Camp, bring with me... bringing..."

Great, excited to the point of forgetting what to say.

No wonder the Imperial Army was utterly defeated by the Northern Camp. With no other choice, he had to climb up and pat his head. "There is no need to report to me, let General Tan handle it."

"You go back and tell your Majesty to not rejoice so soon. The Northern Camp only had a few soldiers, after everyone is all gone, I

would not be able to magically manifest new people either, at that time if the reinforcements don't come..."

The messenger looked at him in bewilderment.

Military strategy teaches: in a battle, use direct methods to engage , use indirect methods to win. Perhaps many people only remembered 'use indirect methods to win', always thinking that a talented general would be able to find a path for survival in a dead end, saving a staggering building by their own efforts — but how could that be possible?

Unless Gu Yun could use mud to create a godlike army who did not need to eat, drink or fear weapons.

The news of the first victory had been sent to the capital, how joyful would the ministers be right at this moment, but what would be the next step? Not discussing the long-term tasks of battles for national strength and battle for reserved resources, but only the task at hand right now, with just a handful of troops, what could he do?

Gu Yun knew that no matter how prestigious this opening battle might have seemed, it could not change the fact that he was only taking advantage of the location to resist.

With a pained smile, he left the Emperor's messenger behind, moving to Tan Hong Fei's place.

Tan Hong Fei held a Wind Slasher with one head that had already been flattened, the top that had been burnt still had half of the character 'Lian' inscribed on it.

Many officers and soldiers would engrave their names on their Wind Slasher, so that even if they take them for repair, they would not have to worry about finding their old fellow who have been through lives and deaths with them afterwards. If the owner were to die on the battlefield and the body could not be found, their comrades would bring back their Wind Slasher and pour a pot of wine as offering, the soul could then be considered to be able to rest in the afterlife.

Tan Hong Fei lifted up the cutting edge with both hands and handed it to Gu Yun: "Marshal."

Gu Yun received it. Suddenly, he had a feeling that the Black Iron Camp, which had undergone many disasters and hardships, many reunions and separations, but always laid under this home country, like a seed, they scattered in all directions and grew into large trees piercing the sky unbeknownst to anyone.

Chang Geng came up behind him and said, "Last night, thirteen chariots were damaged, five hundred Cavalry were killed in battle, nearly a thousand were seriously injured, not counting the minor injuries. Twelve Eagle Armors fell, most of the golden boxes had exploded in the air. I'm afraid their bodies had been..."

Gu Yun nodded, feeling that this number of casualties was acceptable: "This was all thanks to General Lian's contribution."

Chang Geng whispered, "I'm afraid someone will come for a truce discussion at the morning meeting."

"They will not," Gu Yun said. "The Westerners suffered such great losses last night, they had no faces left to come for a truce. Unless they besieged the capital to the point where we have no way of flying, they would never talk to us."

... And that was just a matter of time.

Chang Geng was silent for a moment: "I have heard that an Emperor of the former dynasty who was subjugated by the northern barbarians had secretly escaped from the secret passage when the capital was besieged, if we truly could not defend..."

"We must defend even if we can't." Gu Yun suddenly said, "Do you know the Jinghua Garden in the west of the capital?"

Chang Geng was stunned.

Gu Yun raised his index finger to his lips and made a *'shush'* gesture, for him not to go on further. Jinghua Garden in the west of the capital was a summer resort built between Yuan He Dynasty and Emperor Wu Dynasty. In those days, they would go to Jinghua

Garden every summer for cooling for the former Emperor was not able to tolerate heat.

But after Li Feng ascended to the throne, the cost for eating and dressing had become simpler. Even the money for the queen and the imperial concubine's makeup was reduced by half, there no longer exist the flashy traditions such as hunting or spring travels.

Yet such a thrifty man who was far different from his father, still kept the habit of going to the palace every summer — but not for enjoyment. With the palace's government affairs piling up, he usually got up early to rush to the palace, then rushed back before nightfall, walking around the capital resembling a wandering dog. Not to mention cooling, it was already a miracle to not contract a heatstroke.

Li Feng subjected himself to such suffering, if he was not insane, it could only mean... there was something of great importance in Jinghua Garden that he must check on it frequently.

How keen was Chang Geng, an idea immediately came up his mind: all the Generals on four sides are involved in the smuggling of *Ziliujin*, then what about the Emperor himself?

In such a hurry, he hadn't had time to check the account books of the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Military Affairs... but with Li Feng's character of wanting to grasp everything in his hand, it was not surprising for him to build his own private *Ziliujin* storage.

Gu Yun: "Your eldest brother does not trust anyone. This is only my guess, don't tell anyone else."

Chang Geng frowned: "This is troubling... will Li Feng make peace then?"

Gu Yun laughed and shook his head. "It's possible for someone to come and make peace with him, mm... he would not run either."

Chang Geng placed both hands behind his back, the blood and mud on his body had dried up the night before, making him appear quite colorful. The young *Yan Bei Wang* while wearing this colorful

appearance, slowly walked as if he was strolling in the imperial garden one spring afternoon, then after a moment of thinking, he commented lightly: "Yes, Li Feng is not afraid of death, he was afraid of other things."

Gu Yun couldn't help looking at him. He found that Master Feng Han was right. Chang Geng really seemed calm and relaxed at all times, he suddenly asked, "When on earth did you become a slow-tempered person?"

"When am I slow-tempered? I am very impatient right now." Chang Geng laughed: "This is actually what I have learned from yifu. I found that whenever yifu was uncomfortable, you often pretended to be very excited, and as this joy showed on your face, in turn, it would make your heart feel much better. Hence, every time I found myself feeling particularly impetuous, I would deliberately slow myself down a bit, and find that I could actually became calmer. Ah, too much fire is not good for health. It could easily..."

"... cause you to not sleep well." Gu Yun had heard him said this more than once, he was able to smoothly continue his words: "How much do you really care about sleeping? And moreover, when did I ever force myself to laugh when I feel unhappy?"

Chang Geng lifted his eyebrows, gave him a leisure look, his face conveying: *"Whatever you say"*.

"The whole army prepare to withdraw." Gu Yun said tiredly: "The injured move first, in a short time, the Westerners will react. We will set out for an ambush."

After two steps, Gu Yun felt his body was utterly exhausted. He could not help but think of Chang Geng's heresy that no one knew from which doctor he had learnt it from. He took a sip of wine from the bottle at his waist, carried General Lian's Wind Slasher behind him and whistled.

The horse trotted to him at the sound. Gu Yun changed the whistle into a strange tune he invented himself, picking a small bright yellow wildflower from the ground and jumping on the horse. "My calvary brothers, follow me!"

Gu Yun held the wild flower in his hand, wanting to place it on Chang Geng, the person nearest to him. Unexpectedly, his eyes met Chang Geng's the moment he lifted his hand. Chang Geng's gaze had been following him all this time, not separated for even a second, his expression seemed to say: *"It would be alright even if you placed a red veil* on my head"*.

**wedding veil for brides*

Marshal Gu shivered, not daring to act, he placed the flower on General Tan's large helmeted head, explained profoundly the saying 'a flower inserted on a pile of *something*'.

A group of veteran soldiers in the Northern Camp roared with laughter. The Black Cavalries whistled as they followed Gu Yun. One after another, the whistle of various tunes came and went, Gu Yun shouted angrily at the front, "Who allowed you to copy me, I'm about to urinate already!"

Needless to say, after such a scene, everyone did indeed feel a lot less fatigued.

At this time, on the Westerners' sea monster ——

Master Ja dragged his exhausted body into the cabin door, just in time to meet the head of the Pope's guard regiment.

"How is it?" Asked Master Ja.

Captain of the regiment: "He had already woken up and is about to call you in."

In the chaotic naval battle, the place where the Pope was located was grazed by a blown rocket, happening to detonate rows of explosives, the tremendous impact struck him unconscious. His absence had substantial effect in the Western Navy being thoroughly defeated in the clash with Black Iron Camp afterwards.

With great relief, Master Ja strode in. The Pope's forehead was already treated with medicine. His white hair scattered on one side,

showing a few marks at the corners of his eyes.

Master Ja knelt on the ground, tiredly saying: "Your Majesty, I am truly sorry..."

The elderly man on the bed did not open his eyes, he only murmured, "Gu Yun."

"Yes, it was Gu Yun. We had planned to trap him here at first. In fact, we were ready to face him in the Northern Sea, but yesterday the black crows suddenly appeared." Master Ja paused, his expression appearing quite distressed. "The Black Iron Camp had been held back by the allied forces at the Western Regions at Jiayu gate. I should have this confidence, but still..."

"Still lost your steady footing in face of the enemy."

Master Ja could not find a response.

The Pope smiled and said, "Everyone will always meet with seemingly invincible enemies in their life. Some are disasters, some are just practice. Do you know what is the difference between disaster and practice?"

Master Ja was stunned.

"The difference is that disaster cannot be defeated, but practice could be overcome - I think it is very easy to distinguish. The communication of the Central Plains has been cut off. Such a small capital, if there truly is many troops, how could it become chaotic so easily when we used tricks to provoke the Northern Camp to rebel."

Master Ja: "You mean..."

"Gu is young in age, but more than half of his life had been spent on the battlefield. Do not let him lead you by the nose. Even if he were to be the most powerful wolf king, at this time, his claws and teeth had all been pulled out and trapped in a prison. Go, you must believe in yourself."

On the same day, the Western Navy reorganized themselves and landed again in Da Gu Harbor.

After landing on the shore, they were being attacked fiercely once again. This time in the clear blue sky and daylight, Master Ja was steady as he calmly commanded. He would soon easily win over all the Heavy Armors which had been using the location to stubbornly struggle .

Unexpectedly, before he could feel proud, as he opened up the iron mask of the 'captives', he discovered that this wave of ambush were not Great Liang's soldiers, but a group of iron puppets!

The iron puppets were temporarily recruited from the families from the high ranking families and nobilities in the capital. Under a number of protective masks was a mask of a naughty child, with its big white face, showing a large smile resembling a bowl of blood, laughing at the people in front, their mockery were beyond words.

A Western soldier was incredibly angered, as he reached out attempting to snatch off the mask, Master Ja exclaimed, "Don't touch..."

Unfortunately, it was too late. A thin lead was pulled under the mask. With only a gentle touch, the iron puppet exploded, directly bombing several Western soldiers next to it.

The mask flew out, landed at Master Ja's feet, continuing to display its mocking smile.

The Northern Camp only feigned an attack. At this time, the entire army had retreated, the Western Navy furiously charged inside the city, ready to use blood to appease their anger. They did not expect to find an empty city.

Since the news of Jiangnan's situation arrived in the capital, *Yan Bei Wang* had joined hands with the Ministry of Housing and evacuated the citizens in the frontlines in batches, some of whom were unwilling to leave, but after witnessing the scene of artillery fire

the night before, they had already rushed to flee.

Gu Yun had given the enemy a completely empty city.

Chapter 62: City Besieged

T/N: Brace yourself

—

Chang Geng looked at Gu Yun and said, "Wanted to save up dowry, to wed the grand general."

—

There was a horrifying silence in the empty city, plunging one's heart to panic. As soon as Master Ja waved his hand, his men immediately scattered to search inside the surrounding houses.

Residential courtyards were built along the riverside, winding and curving, and it was very easy for outsiders to get lost within them as they wandered. Sometimes, they would encounter large stones blocking the path, making the already difficult terrain become all the more complicated and confusing.

Master Ja had an ominous feeling in his heart, suddenly beginning to regret his bold advancement.

At that moment, a Western soldier cried out. All the people around him immediately became frightened birds, instantly drawing their swords. Many steel armours soon formed into a circle, canon with black muzzles pointing at the unusual locust tree.

They saw a Western soldier hanging down from a tree, half of his head had been blown away, there was no telling which battle he had died in. There was a white face mask tied to his bloody head - this time it had changed into a crying face!

An explosive noise sounded. It turned out to be an armored soldier who had shot the cannon out of nervousness. The body on the tree was suddenly blown up into pile of meat and fell down. Then, a

horrifying laugh sounded, all the soldiers underneath hurriedly retreated as if they were in the presence of a great enemy.

A moment later, a round-faced owl emerged from the crown of the tree, looking at the two-legged animals under it. Then, the owl fluttered its wings and flew straight into the sky, spreading its strange laughter everywhere.

Frightened people into a cold sweat in the broad daylight.

"Sir Jacobson, will we continue the search?"

Master Ja swallowed with difficulty: "No... Retreat, get out of here, quickly! "

He had not yet finished speaking, when suddenly there was a sharp noise of explosion in the distance, followed by several blood-curdling screams. Large fireworks soared up into the sky, exploding brightly.

Someone shouted in fright, "We were ambushed!"

"Withdraw!"

"Leave now!"

The sound of cannons and arrows rang out in unison. Several explosions caused by someone unknown knocked down the already unstable stone houses. The disarray of rubbles combined with the large stones that had blocked the road caused the empty city to quickly become a big maze.

The map in the hands of the Westerners became a piece of disposable paper. The drawbacks of their unfamiliarity in terrain instantly became clear. A group of Heavy Armors and foot soldiers were deeply trapped inside, resembling flies without heads. For a moment, they weren't able to find a way out.

Master Ja had no choice but to whistle for the Eagle Armors, for them to take off and command from the sky. For better or worse, there would be someone to lead them out.

The panic-stricken Western Army retreated to the city gate. There was no telling who happened to touch some kind of mechanism. A tooth-aching noise of gears rang from the city gate. For a moment, all the Western soldiers drew their bows, all arrows pointed to the building, ready to fire, but something slowly fell down from it.

Master Ja pushed aside the frightened guards to take a look and was furious to find it was another white face mask. This time it was the face of a demon!

Master Ja: "..."

"Sir, we... Shall we take a detour?"

Master Ja raised his hand to interrupt him and stood in place for a moment, his expression darkening: "His Majesty is right. Gu Yun has no trump card in his hand, he can only rely on these underhanded tricks. Are you all already frightened by the masks? Ambush...Hmp!"

He let out an angered laughed then said coldly, "Demolish this city for me, let me see where they could hide!"

However, more than one hour later, Master Ja, who razed the empty city to the ground, searched in the ruins three times, finally had to admit that this godforsaken place had wasted his countless valuable time, money and *Ziliujin*. It truly was an empty city. The so-called 'ambush' consisted of only two masks and an owl that had soon flown away.

Master Ja tightened his teeth to the point of almost drawing blood: "Where are the path-finder Eagles? Go at full speed!"

At this time, on the path from Dong'an to the capital, Gu Yun, who was hiding under the tree, received the Qian Li Yan given by Tan Hong Fei and watched several path-finding Eagles whistling from the top of their heads and speeding towards the capital.

He spat out the straw he was currently chewing in his mouth and patted the Wind Slasher behind him: "Old Lian, you have made a grand contribution."

Tan Hong Fei asked in a low voice, "How was it?"

"Can you see that?" Gu Yun said lazily, "The foreigner in charge must already be dead or wounded by now. The current leader is obviously unfamiliar with the area around the capital, otherwise he will not be as impulsive as to send Eagles to fly around."

In the imperial city, the capital had always been strict, no one is allowed to sneak a peek at will. Black Eagles dared not fly around, even in exceptional times, and they could only land at the base of the Northern Camp then ride into the capital on horseback after removing the Eagle's armor.

But most people did not know, the reason why the Black Eagle dared not fly was not because the Black Iron Camp was particularly strict in following regulation. Gu Yun knew that once the Eagles flew across the border, it was easy to make contact and run into the 'anti-air net'.

Outside the Nine Gates of the Capital, there is an invisible 'anti-air net', built during the reign of Emperor Wu and took thirty years to complete. It was a masterpiece of the Ling Shu Institute. There were numerous hidden piers* under the net, and the main commander was on the top of Qi Yuan tower.

**these are pillar-like structures*

The reason why the building was so high was that besides providing food, drink, and entertainment for visitors from all over the world, it also played a very important role - it was the main pier of the anti-air net.

There was a 'Tian Yuan Di Fang* Pavilion' on the 'Zhai Xing Tower**', locked up tightly behind layers of doors in peacetime. For the sake of this Tia Yuan Di Fang Pavilion, it had made bald of many masters of the Ling Shu Institute. It would create a special optical network outside the nine gates and was very tightly knitted. Even at night, it would be easily be covered by the light of stars, moon, and flame. Unless one had unusual abilities, it would hardly be visible to the naked eye.

*天圆地方, *lit. Round Sky, Square Earth: an ancient traditional Chinese philosophy where people believed that the sky is a rounded dome and the ground is flat. This was also incorporated in their architecture.*

*** Star-plucking Tower, first mentioned in Chapter 22*

This layer of optical network was 300 feet up from the ground and would not affect the people and animals on the ground. If someone flew by using the Eagle Armor, at low altitude, they would be discovered by the gate guards, there would be *baihong* arrows waiting for them. If the Eagle flew above 300 feet, it would touch the anti air net.

The light would then be reflected back to the Tian Yuan Di Fang Pavilion, then back to the covert piers in the area of the anti air net through special mirrors. The piers would then move in accordance to the light signal and would lock on the position of the offender, shooting arrows from all directions. If the Eagle tried to dodge, they would soon find that in the scope of the forbidden net, where there were secret piers, arrows would continue to follow them inseparably like shadows.

Only on New Year's Eve, the Tian Yuan Di Fang Pavilion would temporarily close the anti air net for its annual maintenance, and the task of keeping watch would be handed over to the guarding station on the Red Kites.

"That path-finding Eagle will not be returning, the commander of the foreigners will soon remember the legendary anti air net in stories. Under the command of the *Feng Huo* Order, all Red Kites will go up to the sky, and the position of the anti air net will change accordingly. For a while, they will not know where that mechanism

had run to. The closer they approach the capital, the more afraid they will be to let the Eagle Armor fly too high..."

Gu Yun whispered to Tan Hong Fei, "Give orders, tell the brothers to rest well, we will start at night. The Black Eagle goes first, suppress them from high places. Light Cavalry will ambush them from both wings, breaking up the enemy line. Do not be eager to fight, attack then leave, do not get yourselves trapped inside. The chariots will pretend to block their path, blowing up two or three rounds then let them retreat. Do not force the other party to their last resort. Our troops are not strong enough."

Tan Hong Fei asked in a low voice: "Marshal, why didn't we ambush inside the city?"

"Who's going to ambush in broad daylight?" Gu Yun's eyes widened. "Is there problem with your brain?"

... Master Ja must have sneezed twice.

Tan Hong Fei carefully considered it for a moment, feeling it was quite reasonable. He then asked: "Marshal, how do you know they will come here at night?"

Gu Yun: "It was calculated by your *Yan Bei Wang*, fine him money if he turned out to be wrong. It doesn't really matter, even a small amount of his lucky money is already more than half a year's salary of mine."

Chang Geng was sitting at one side repairing the leather grip of the iron bow. After fighting a long battle, bits of it had torn away. No one knew where he had found a small knife that he was using, currently filing a small piece of leather. His fingers were incredibly adept, causing one to be dizzy. As he was suddenly named, Chang Geng did not raise his head either, he laughed at Tan Hong Fei and replied: "Either way, everything from top to bottom belongs in the account books of the Marquis's manor."

Tan Hong Fei was a crude man, his way of thinking being *'All comrades are my own arms and legs'.* After fighting side by side in the first battle with *Yan Bei Wang*, he had soon considered the other to be

his family, not caring who his mother was. After hearing this, he teased without care: "Your Highness and Marshal are as close as one. If only you were a princess, we might have another Princess tent in the Black Iron Camp as we did in those days."

**In case anyone forgot, Gu Yun's father was a Marshal and his mother was a Princess.*

Gu Yun: "..."

He could not help licking the itchy root of his teeth.

Chang Geng's hands came to a halt for a moment, then continued General Tan's words: "Unfortunately, I am not beautiful as a flower or a jade, your Marshal with a cart filled of fruits would not want me."

**a reference to Pan An, a writer during Jin dynasty.*
Whenever he went out, every ladies old and young
would throw him fruits to express their adoration.

Tan Hong Fei said mindlessly: "Oh, it isn't right, the Emperor usually calls Marshal 'Uncle', there's a gap between generations!"

Gu Yun: "... Go away!"

General Tan who only said a few words of jest, together with Yan Bei Wang who harbored different intentions in his heart, looked at each other and laughed aloud.

At night, a cuckoo call came from the distance. It was a signal that the enemy had entered the trap. Tan Hong Fei was pressed back down by Gu Yun as he moved to stand up.

"Wait a bit longer." Gu Yun whispered, "Until the fourth period."

His eyes shone in the dark, like a pair of divine weapons that had been sharpened by blood.

Tan Hong Fei couldn't help from licking his dry and cracked lips: "What kind of calculation did *Yan Bei Wang* make? Really..."

Gu Yun was about to say, *"His teacher is Old General Zhong."*

Unexpectedly, he did not know when Chang Geng had came closer and suddenly answered from behind, "I had spent all day long carefully calculating, gradually grew accustomed to it."

Tan Hong Fei: "Huh?"

Chang Geng looked at Gu Yun and said, "Wanted to save up dowry, to wed the grand general."

Gu Yun: "You two are quite persistent, aren't you?"

That idiot Tan Hong Fei laughed. Gu Yun was helpless with this goddamn type who always 'mentioned things that should not be mentioned' and 'spared no effort to make the Marshal's heart more uncomfortable'. No one knew when, Chang Geng that kid had become more and more careless in front of him. That day at the hot spring, Gu Yun advised him to "let go of burden". As it turned out, he truly did take it to heart and "packed up lightly" for him to see.

Chang Geng was very understanding of proper advancing and retreating. After teasing Gu Yun, he immediately mended things over: "Yifu, I'm only joking, don't be angry."

Tan Hong Fei: "Our Marshal does not have much of a temper. This old Tan had lived these many years, I have only ever seen him become angry once at the palace..."

As soon as these words came out, Even Tan Hong Fei knew that he had made a mistake, closing his mouth in embarrassment.

Gu Yun's expression faded.

Tan Hong Fei was not good at holding back. After a while, he still could not help himself from saying: "Marshal, that is..."

Gu Yun cut in: "Tell the Eagles to get ready!"

Tan Hong Fei's teeth tightened, finally helpless, he sighed.

Chang Geng patted him on the shoulder. "I'll go."

It was the darkest hour before dawn when the night deepened, the moon faded and the light began to rise.

Master Ja was frightened on his march during the day, afraid of being ambushed by Gu Yun several times. He was both fearful and furious, not daring to relax even after setting camp at night. For fear that one of Gu Yun's false ambushes would suddenly become a reality, he did not dare to close his eyes to rest throughout the night.

Watching the long night passing by, there was still no movement around. Master Ja finally could no longer stand it and took a short nap.

Unexpectedly, just as he was falling into a deep sleep, there was a loud explosion as if the entire camp had been bombed. Master Ja's whole body broke out in a cold sweat, instantly getting up and rushed out. The whole night sky was lit up in flame.

"My lord, get away!"

A cluster of arrows glinting with fire fell from the sky. Master Ja was pushed aside by a guard. The night breeze became hot enough for cooking, two teams of Black cavalry resembling whirlwind charged over.

"Heavy Armors!" Master Ja roared, "Don't panic, there aren't many soldiers in Central Plains..."

Before he finished, there was a loud noise behind him. A line of chariots mysteriously appeared. For a moment, sand and rocks were flying. It was incredibly chaotic.

Master Ja was an expert in creating rift, turning countries against one another and was well-versed in scheming, but he was not a effective commander on the front line. He was too accustomed to careful and deep planning. Once the enemy exceeded his

expectations, he would easily be unable to react in time and lose control of his troops.

Suddenly, an indescribable sense of chill climbed up his back. Master Ja felt as if he was a frog locked down by a snake's killing intention. He turned around in fear and found an iron arrow shooting through the night sky like a meteor chasing the moon, heading straight for his face.

Master Ja had no time to hide. In the crucial moment, a Western soldier in Heavy Armor roared and covered him. The iron arrow penetrated through the thick steel plate of the Heavy Armor, the sinister arrow head showing through the back of the soldier.

Master Ja watched the force approaching with alarm and saw a young man standing on the back of a Black Eagle, a long bow in his hand.

He was wearing the glass used for aiming from the *Qian Li Yan* on his nose, looking at... no, glancing at him from above, his gaze seemed to contain poison.

Master Ja's personal guards immediately pointed the cannons at the Black Eagle in the air. The young man seemed to have smiled, shook his head with an indifferent expression that conveyed *'this target cannot easily be hit'*. Then, he jumped down from about twenty meters in the air without hurry, separating from the Black Eagle, just in time to dodge an explosive reek of the scent of gunpowder.

Gu Yun immediately charged forward and caught Chang Geng who had jumped directly from the Eagle's back. The Wind Slasher in his hand, driven by the steam, transformed into an invisible whirlwind. The horse's hooves rose high, the cutting edge swept by in a circle, followed by numerous shrieks and cries. Somebody's blood had splashed on the cinnabar beauty mark on the corner of his eye. He then ushered the horse with his feet, in the blink of an eye, the war steed had jumped off the battle circle ——

Gu Yun forcefully gave Chang Geng a smack. "Bastard, do you want to find death?"

Chang Geng intended to jump down directly. Before landing on the ground, he would use the Light Armor's leg protector on his feet to speed up and cushion the fall. Unexpectedly, Gu Yun had interfered. Momentarily in a state of shock, he stared at Gu Yun's face only inches away from his. His chest shook violently and he almost could not sit still, grabbing hold of Gu Yun's cold iron guard on his wrist.

His gaze tore through the calmness on the surface, fiery as a living object, Gu Yun was angered: "What are you looking at!"

Chang Geng calmed down with difficulty, retracting his flaming eyes under the eyelids and coughed dryly: "It's time to cast the net."

Gu Yun pulled him to his chest then turned around and whistled. All Light Cavalry immediately gathered together and rushed toward the enemy's line like blankets. The Western army which had been shot heavily by the Black Eagles in the sky finally began to regroup with difficulty, Master Ja roared, "Open a path with Heavy Armors, tear a hole in the rear!"

There was no need to tear it open. The battle front of the Northern Camp chariots were arranged in a very feeble formation, withdrawing as soon as they made contact and letting the Western troops retreat.

Gu Yun made a gesture to Tan Hong Fei not far away. The Light Cavalry quietly withdrew, resembling a group of wild wolves that did not know what strategy was, running off as soon as they managed to take a bite, stopping just in time.

Otherwise, waiting until the Western troops came to and reacted, their meager Light Cavalry would only be nothing more than food for the enemy. Of course, when they did, the black whirlwind had blown away and disappeared into the darkness without a trace and could no longer be found.

On April 15th - Long An seventh year, the Black Iron Camp attacked Western troops at night in the west of Dong'an City.

On April 17th, the Western vanguard forces was led around in a circle by the nose by the Black Iron Camp for a few days. Finally unable to go on with this disturbance, they had sought reinforcement from their navy backup, then remained still in one place.

On April 23rd, the Western Army reinforcement arrived. Black Iron's Light Cavalry was forced to retreat. The Western Army continued their pursuit after gaining victory, rushing to Wuqing. They ended up being led into the trap to trigger the anti air net by Gu Yun, more than half of the Western Eagle Armors were damaged, they were forced to retreat once again.

On April 26th, the Pope's condition had shown signs of improvement, he immediately returned to command the battles himself.

On April 29th, Wuqing fell.

On May 3rd, Daxing Mansion was heavily shot by the Western Army.

With tens of thousands of Western troops pressing forward, Gu Yun brought a group of Light Cavalry and Eagle Armor from the Northern Camp to attest to them for nearly a month, in the end, he could not continue for any longer.

On the 7th, Gu Yun retreated back to defend the capital, all nine gates were tightly closed, the reinforcements still had not arrived.

At this moment, resentments and enmities had all been pushed outside the city wall, the capital of Great Liang entered the summer in the shade of green trees, but there were no sight of flower boats singing on the artificial lakes in the city. At last, the Westerners sent out their dignified envoys.

Chapter 63: City Breaks

T/N: my heart breaks

—

The heart of the earth was burning, the entire capital was trembling.

—

Because of the Western envoys, the early morning arguments had made everyone tensed. After the court was dismissed, ignoring a large group of people who wanted to probe his intention, Chang Geng helped in supporting the elderly Master Feng Han out of the palace.

People in the capital were in panic, there was a shortage of horse carriage. Gu Yun would usually ask Huo Dan to lead a horse outside the palace to wait for him. But on this day, there was no telling what had delayed Huo Dan, he was nowhere to be seen.

Chang Geng did not pay attention to it at first, walking side by side with the old master of the Ling Shu Institute, slowly making their way back.

Master Feng Han spent all day long inside the Ling Shu Institute, his eye sockets had sunken in. His whole body was like a radish that had been drained of water, only the pair of brightly shining eyes were left.

"Your Highness has the patience to accompany us old things with bad legs and slow feet." sighed Master Feng Han. "Do you have any news about reinforcements? When on earth can they come?"

Chang Geng: "The turmoil in the four frontiers has stuck the five military districts. What the local garrison is like, you already know. In recent years, the military expenditure and *Ziliujin* quota of each state have been reduced repeatedly. They can hardly afford several Heavy Armor units, most of them used Light Armors."

"Although the Light Armor is fast in marching and is easy to mobilize, it is also very easily hindered. Once the enemy forces set Heavy Armors along the road or intercepted by combat chariots, if the commander is a little inexperienced, it would be easy to bring the troops into the enemy's encirclement — the foreigners won't even have to put out many people."

"Your Highness truly made this old man feel ashamed, Ling Shu Institute hasn't had any success in creating anything of use for several years now," Zhang Feng Han shook his head mockingly. "This useless immortal man could only sit and eat salary, I had intended to request the Emperor for retirement next year. Unexpectedly, we were met with a national disaster, perhaps I would not be able to die of old age."

Chang Geng gently said: "Master Feng Han's contributions would last for a thousand years, you must not belittle yourself."

"Thousand years...would there still exist Great Liang after a thousand years?" Zhang Feng Han pursed his lips. "I had thought as I entered Ling Shu Institute, I will no longer need to pay attention to the outside world, dealing with fire engine and steel armor for the rest of my life, concentrating on doing my own work.

"But the bustling world turned out to be too crowded. Even if the righteous and the villains went their own ways, they would always came across each other. The more you did not want to entangle with anything, the more you wanted to do something outstanding, the more you would end up doing nothing — even if one only wished to be the lower class with their hands stained in oil."

Chang Geng smiled and remained quiet, he knew Master Feng Han was only expressing his feelings and did not want to hear his reply.

At this stage, the contradiction between the imperial power and the military power of two generations was unquestionably the fuse, but it was not the most fundamental reason — the long-term illness of the gradually emptying treasury had doomed them to this bleak end.

Zhang Feng Han said: "Every day, the piers of the anti air net are being adjusted. Now the foreigners only dare to drive, a large number of their Eagle Armors dare not to go up, but the strength in the hidden piers are still limited. I've heard that foreigners use ropes to 'fly the kites' outside the city every day. I'm afraid that in a few days, the iron arrows stored in the hidden piers will become unsustainable. What should we do then? Does Marshal Gu have any plan?"

In total, there are fewer than 100 Black Eagles in Northern Camp, including those missing an arm and a leg. If the anti air net would fail, perhaps that would be the time when the city would break down.

Chang Geng: "Mm, he knows, he's trying to find a way out."

Zhang Feng Hen who was full of concern, hearing this, he did not know whether to laugh or cry. He wondered whether he should say that *Yan Bei Wang* was a 'hero raised from youth', or whether he should say that he was slow-tempered. It seemed that even if the sky collapsed in front of him, the little prince would only reply with 'I know' as if it had nothing to do with him.

Zhang Feng Han deliberately lowered his voice and said, "Today, we did not see Commander Han of the Imperial Army. Did Your Highness see that? Now there are already rumors in the court that although the Emperor outwardly denounced the Western envoys, he had planned to relocate the capital."

Chang Geng smiled, but he was not at all surprised: "His Majesty will not do such a thing, we are not at our last resort yet. I see the cart of Ling Shu Institute, allow me to help you up... Ah, here comes Uncle Huo."

Huo Dan was moving over in a hurry, his expression restless, he walked to Chang Geng and said, "This old servant is late today, Your Highness please forgive me."

"It is alright," Chang Geng waved his hand. "What had delayed Uncle Huo?"

"..." Huo Dan took a careful look at his face. "The Marquis was

injured by Western arrows last night. I had only just heard about it in the early morning. I just went.... Oh, Your Highness!"

In Huo Dan's and Zhang Feng Han's bewilderment, Chang Geng, who was still strolling casually, suddenly had a change in his expression, turning over and jumped onto his horse's back and disappeared like a gust of wind.

In front of the Nine Gates, the smoke of gunpowder had not dispersed, the Western army had only withdrawn at dawn, Gu Yun was able to had a moment of rest.

His armor had indented, the arrow had been pulled out. Two military doctors was surrounding Gu Yun, holding forceps and scissors, carefully prying his deformed shoulder guard down, his clothes had glued to his body.

Chang Geng hurriedly rushed in, his eyes fell on Gu Yun for a moment, then could not help himself and looked away. His expression was even worse than the injured man.

"Ah...," Gu Yun took in a shaky breath. "I said, can you two be more decisive? Are you doing embroidery — how was it?"

Chang Geng did not answer, took a deep breath, dismissed the two military doctors, then stooped and carefully observed Gu Yun's armor that was unable to be removed.

He took out a finger-long iron forceps, holding Gu Yun's shoulder close to him, and cut them off from the other side. His movements were very fast, the sharp forceps easily cut through the deformed iron armor, blood immediately soaking onto his hand.

Chang Geng's face tightened up and for a while, he was a little

out of breath. He whispered, "Injured like this, why didn't you let me know?"

Gu Yun who still had his face twisted as he endured the pain, gritted his teeth and said, "It's nothing — what did the Western envoys say at the meeting?"

"What else is there to say, spilling loads of nonsense in the Golden Palace," Chang Geng flexed his unsteady fingers, removing the fragments of the armor glued to Gu Yun's body by blood: "Said they wanted us to cease the 'persecution and plundering' towards the countries in the Western Regions, let the territory outside Jiayu Gate become a commercial zone for all countries, the legal system inside the zone acting in accordance with their country rule of law, and..."

The deformed shoulder armor was completely uncovered. Chang Geng stared at Gu Yun's wound and inhaled sharply. He stood upright and slowed down for a moment.

"And what...? " Gu Yun shivered, his sweat dripped down. "I'm telling you, Doctor, how come you're still afraid of blood?"

Chang Geng's body was as stiff as an iron rod: "I'm afraid of your blood."

He grabbed Gu Yun's wine bottle and downed two mouthfuls, feeling dizzy and nauseous. He forced himself to breathe for a moment, Chang Geng then took one of the scissors and cut out the clothes which original color could not be seen anymore.

"Thirty-six counties in the Northern Frontier, from Xijing to Youzhou in Zhili, will all be assigned to the Eighteen Tribes, and the capital of Great Liang will be moved to Luoyang of the Central Plains. Princess He Ning will also be sent to the Eighteen Tribes as a pledge. From then on, we will be the subject to Eighteen Tribes and pay tribute to them every year."

He Ning was Li Feng's only daughter, she was only seven years old.

Gu Yun said angrily, "Bullshit!"

As soon as he struggled, blood started to gush out. Unable to hold it anymore, Chang Geng roared: "Don't move!"

The two men were relatively silent for a moment. Gu Yun's face was unfathomable, after a long time, he said, "... Continue."

"In addition, they forced Li Feng to order Shen Yi to withdraw the garrison of Southern Frontiers that occupied the Southern Sea islands, divide the Eastern Sea Canal into rivers, retreat the Southern Navy inward, the outer territory and the Eastern Sea line will belong to the far east region of the Westerners." Chang Geng's eyes were heavy, but his hands remained gentle, wiping the wound for him. He paused and said, "There's still compensation..."

Gu Yun was silent but all his muscles had tightened.

"On the court today, Li Feng wanted to behead the envoys, the ministers had stopped him." Chang Geng held Gu Yun's unhurt shoulder and said, "I will clean the wound now, yifu, shall I seal your consciousness temporarily?"

Gu Yun shook his head.

Chang Geng gently advised: "I will only use a little medicine, you have a strong resistance to drugs, you will not be sleeping long. If there are changes outside the city, I will defend in your stead..."

"If you want to wash it then do it," Gu Yun interrupted. "Don't talk nonsense."

Chang Geng looked at him and realized that it was useless to reason with this person.

Just then, Tan Hong Fei came running in: "Marshal..."

Gu Yu turned around, suddenly happening to catch a strange fragrance. With his guard down, he inhaled a mouthful, his whole body instantly turned soft.

The Marquis of Order, wise and adept in martial arts, never thought that His Highness would know this kind of underhanded means of the pugilist world and even use it on himself.

Gu Yun: "You..."

Without blinking, Chang Geng quickly inserted a fine needle into his acupoint then grabbed Gu Yun's unconscious body.

Tan Hong Fei watched blankly at the door as his commander was being knocked out by someone, staring at His Royal Highness with wide eyes: "..."

Chang Geng made a gesture for him to stay silent, hugged Gu Yun and laid him down, then began to wash his wound carefully.

Tan Hong Fei's tongue stiffened: "This...then..."

Chang Geng: "It's okay. Let him sleep for a while to ease his pain."

Tan Hong Fei blinked a few times — long ago, he thought that His Highness *Yan Bei Wang* was a kind and gentle scholar. Later, he found out that he could fight well and was amazing at plotting. He was filled with respect for him and wanted to become closer. It was only until this moment that Commander Tan truly felt his admiration for this man.

Tan Hong Fei unconsciously reached out and touched his face. The scar left by Gu Yun had not disappeared yet. He thought to himself, "*His Highness is too courageous*."

Chang Geng: "Ah yes, what's the matter?"

Tan Hong Fei came back to reality and quickly said: "Your Highness, the Emperor has arrived, the carriage is behind, you see..."

During the conversation, Li Feng already came in with a haggard look, wearing common attires, bringing with him only Zhu Little Feet.

Li Feng looked down at the unconscious Gu Yun and reached for his forehead: "Is Uncle alright?"

"It was only a flesh wound." Chang Geng wrapped the bandage around the injury, draped a thin silk robe over Gu Yun, and tidied up

his silver needles: "It's just that I gave him some anesthetic, he will not wake up for a while. Royal Brother, please pardon him."

When Chang Geng finished, he got up and picked up Gu Yun's Wind Slasher. Without wearing armor, he turned to go out.

Li Feng asked, "What's wrong?"

"I will guard the city in yifu's stead for a while," Chang Geng said. "Although the envoys are in the capital, I am afraid it will be a trick of the Westerners. Perhaps they will seize this opportunity as we let down our guard to attack, it is better to be cautious."

Li Feng stood in place for a moment, then suddenly grabbed a sword and followed him out. Zhu Little Feet was taken by surprise: "Your Majesty!"

Li Feng ignored him and went up to the wall.

With the *Qian Li Yan* in hands, Emperor Long An could see the barracks of the Western Army were not far away, and the fertile soil in the suburbs of the capital was now ravaged. In the past, carriages flowed in and out like water outside the nine gates of the capital that had now turned bleak, a corner of the city wall that had collapsed were held up by scrapped armors, faltering.

The ordinary soldiers in the Northern Camp knew Chang Geng, many of them quickly came to greet him, but they did not know Li Feng. They could only see that he was a well-dressed man and had extraordinary demeanor, thus regarded him as a scholarly officer and called him 'Master'.

The Li family brothers who saw eye to eye but not heart to heart, stood side by side on the wall, no similarity in their appearance from head to toe. Their relation was as thin as a window paper, could easily be pierced through with a single finger.

Li Feng suddenly said to Chang Geng, "Han Qi should be back in the afternoon. You can relay this news to Uncle, let him find someone who can be trusted to handle it."

Chang Geng did not inquire any further. He seemed not at all

curious and simply answered, "Yes."

Li Feng: "Not asking where I had sent Han Qi to?"

Chang Geng looked down at the wall and stone tiles. After a moment of silence, he said, "I have been dispatching *Ziliujin* and military supplies with the Ministry of Housing for a while, I found that there were some suspicion about the access of *Ziliujin* in the imperial court in the past few years... but maybe it was Royal Brother's own arrangement."

As soon as Emperor Long An heard about it, he knew that the *Ziliujin* stock he kept hidden had been detected by Chang Geng.

Li Feng said with some embarrassment, "Well, there is a passage to Jinghua Garden in Desheng Gate. I had let Han Qi lead his troops out of the city and open the private storehouse of Jinghua Garden. There are... cough, there are 80,000 kilograms of *Ziliujin* that I haven't yet had time to distribute — don't make a fuss about it. The hearts of the people are not stable at the moment. If they become aware of the secret passage, they could be even more confused."

Chang Geng nodded, he was not surprised — this was Li Feng already taking out everything he have got.

The stubborn Emperor Long An, who would rather be buried under the Nine Gates than lose his country and endure the humiliation of becoming a subject to another.

As soon as he fell silent, there was nothing else to say between them — in fact, it had always been this way, except for the meaningless courteous words when paying regards and during the court's affairs, there truly was nothing to speak about between the Li brothers.

Li Feng: "How old were you when you met Uncle?"

Chang Geng: "... I was twelve years old."

Li Feng made an *'Mm'* sound in response: "He's not married, and have also commanded troops in the northwest for a long time, perhaps he wasn't be able to take care of you very well?"

Chang Geng's eyes moved slightly. "Not at all, he truly knows how to love someone."

Li Feng narrowed his eyes to the bleak sky, he remembered that he had also grown up sharing affection with Gu Yun. When he was a child, he would occasionally envy him that his Royal Father would treat the other better, gentler. But most of the time, he still felt that although this Uncle did not play with them much, he was a very nice person.

He had thought that this juvenile love could last a lifetime.

But only just over a decade, it's already turned out this way.

"A Min," Li Feng said, "If the city breaks down, I will pass the throne to you. You can take the inner palace and the ministers, moving the capital to Luoyang from the secret passage first, then slowly strategize. There will come a day when everyone can return."

Chang Geng finally looked at him.

"If that day could truly come," Li Feng continued, with his eyes fixed on the distance, "You do not have to return the throne to the Crown Prince either, just let your nephews have a place to stay."

Chang Geng did not respond, and after a moment, he said indifferently: "Your Majesty had spoken too soon, we are not yet at that extent."

Li Feng looked at his younger brother and vaguely remembered what he had heard from his mother when he was a child.

She said the Man tribes' women were all monsters. They were the most capable of using poisons and bewitching people. In the future, they would also give birth to monsters that would stain Great Liang's Royal blood.

Later, the Fourth Prince who had been lost for many years was brought back to the palace. For the sake of the late Emperor's will and the name of his own benevolence, Li Feng let him stay. The Ministry of Housing would only have another distribution, in ordinary time, to him, this was all 'out of sight, out of mind'.

Only at this moment did Emperor Long An realize he could not see through this young man.

In face of national calamity and great enemies, he remained unchanged, even the position of the supreme ruler could not touch his heart. The clothes on his body seemed to be the same as last year's, the sleeves had been worn out but still have not been changed.

He was even harder to read than Master Liao Chi of the Hu Guo Temple; interested in nothing, as if nothing in the world could move him.

As Li Feng opened his mouth, Zhu Little Feet whispered to him, "Your Majesty, it's time to go back to the palace."

Li Feng returned to his senses, handed his sword to the officers on one side, silently patted Chang Geng on the shoulder, took a look at the young man's upright figure, then turned away.

After Li Feng left, an ashen-faced monk went up to the city building — it was Liao Ran.

The monks of Hu Guo Temple have all withdrawn into the city. He accompanied the head monk, praying for the nation every day. At night, he would secretly use informants to investigate the people around Li Feng.

Chang Geng looked at him.

Shaking his head, Liao Ran signed, "I had checked all the people around the Emperor, they all have a clean record, no one had had close contact with the Eighteen Tribes witches and their subordinates."

Chang Geng: "The Emperor is doubtful by nature. Our sides repeatedly had information leaked, the spy must be his trusted companion, have you checked Eunuch Zhu?"

Liao Ran shook his head with a solemn look — *Yes I have, there was no problem with him.*

Chang Geng frowned slightly.

At this time, Gu Yun, who was put down by Chang Geng with needles and medicine, finally woke up. He almost didn't know what night it was anymore until the dull pain on the shoulder wound came, and then he realized what had happened.

Gu Yun got up and put on his clothes, ready to come find Chang Geng to settle this debt.

Who would have known that as soon as he came out, a loud noise sounded coming from afar. The whole capital was shaken. Gu Yun held the wall and thought to himself, *"Earthquake?"*

Chang Geng suddenly turned around from the city building, shadows flashed across his eyebrows. He always thought that the traitor in the imperial city was the palace servant beside Li Feng. But with his cautious and suspicious nature, how could he disclose the matter regarding Jinghua Garden to a servant?

Gu Yun: "What's wrong?"

"I don't know," Chang Geng stepped down quickly. "Li Feng came here just now, saying that he had let Han Qi depart from the secret passage and go to Jinghua Garden to transport *Ziliujin*... Is that the direction of the western suburbs?"

Gu Yun woke up completely.

On May 9th, the secret of Jinghua Garden was leaked. The Westerners coming to make peace truly were a cover. But instead of seizing the opportunity to attack the city, they had sent troops to the west of the capital to rob Han Qi halfway.

After struggling in death, Han Qi finally lost the battle. Decisively taking this opportunity, he lit a fire, burning 50 tonnes of

Ziliujin, directly exploding the secret passage, everything was razed to the ground.

This big flame devoured the whole western suburbs like wildfire. The endless *Ziliujin* was like the fire of karma brought from the underground. It torched the entire Imperial Army escorting the *Ziliujin*, along with the surprised Westerners and even the beautiful landscapes and pavilions in Jinghua Garden.

The unique purple smoke reflected half of the sky like an auspicious luck, like glorious sunlight flowing down from the horizon ——

The heart of the earth was burning, the entire capital was trembling.

The heat stretched for tens of miles, slowly flowing from the western suburbs into the rock-solid nine gates, and the capital which should be still cool in the early summer was momentarily comparable to the stove that was the Southern Frontier.

The originally light and indistinguishable odor of the *Ziliujin* flowed with the easterly wind, everyone could finally have a taste of that special flavor — it was some kind of an indescribable fragrance.

It seemed to be rosin mixed with a scent of grass.

All the remaining Heavy Armors were mobilized by Gu Yun, the strings of the *Baihong* bows were tightened.

And as he had expected, the Western Army had also indeed begun moving at this time.

Gu Yun did not know how many Western armies had been burned with that fire, nor how long the Pope could last under such severe loss. After many days of siege, both sides have reached their limit.

Just after that, the first wave of desperate offense arrived. Heavy Armor and chariots moved alternately. Artillery and *Baihong* arrows fell one after another. There was hardly any gap between the fierce

fire power on both sides.

Chapter 64: Destroyed Homeland

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Cast aside thousands of shackles and the normal order of life, could this burning affection in desperate circumstances move his iron heart?

—

Dust and noise were everywhere. The afterheat of the *Ziliujin* fire in the western suburbs continued to rise, people were dripping sweat. In the distance, the screeching noise of Eagle Armors taking off could be heard. The anti-air net had not completely failed, but the Western army could no longer wait, using countless Eagle Armors of themselves to test it out.

This Western Army was dragged around by Gu Yun for more than a month, then was blocked by the Nine Gates City Defense and anti-air net. Every day's consumption had become enormous, and with each day of futile effort, it had also damaged the patience of the Westerners who came from far away for this expedition which had been planned for more than ten years.

Chang Geng seized Liao Ran and said quickly, "Listen to me, the spy cannot be a servant in the palace. We have checked the people around Li Feng more than once. The former dynasty fell due to flattering subjects, our court had never let eunuchs run rampant with power. The Emperor would never make an absurd decision as to leave the Jinghua Garden affairs to a eunuch or an important minister in the court."

"...Not to mention, the news of Han Qi's departure from the palace made people panic. Everyone all said that the Emperor wanted to flee, but Li Feng had calmly silenced them until Han Qi was about to return. Only then did he reveal the news to me personally, even if he intentionally wanted to pass the throne to me."

The monk looked at him in bewilderment.

Chang Geng muttered, "My brother who does not believe in military generals in peacetime, does not trust in civil ministers in wartime? Who could it be? Who else could there be?"

Liao Ran's unconscious movement of moving the Buddha beads in his hands suddenly stopped, he trembled. For a moment, the monk's complexion was as unsightly as a dead man.

Chang Geng's heavy eyes turned to him: "Hu Guo Temple is in the western suburbs."

At that moment, a stray bullet landed next to the two men. Chang Geng and Liao Ran were overthrown by the shockwaves altogether. Chang Geng staggered and could barely remain standing, but the Buddha beads on the monk's neck had burst open.

Old wooden beads scattered everywhere in the muddy red dust.

Chang Geng picked up Liao Ran's collar and dragged the monk to a stand. "Get up, go, if the kill turned out to be a mistake, I will take the blame!"

Liao Ran shook his head instinctively. He thought that as he had practiced Buddhism for many years, he had already seen through the sorrow and joy of this world. Only at this moment, when the latter days of the Law* met with the devil, did he realize that the four great emptiness** was only an illusion of self-righteousness.

*末法 *(mò fǎ), the age of degeneration of Buddha's Law, believed to be the current age in human history, which in this context, in the present timeline of the story*

**四大皆空*, everything is empty, a central teaching of Buddhism*

Chang Geng pushed Liao Ran forward and met the pale-faced monk's frightened eyes: "I'm not afraid of karma. I'm going to handle this. Master, don't stop me, and don't blame me either."

When he was innocent, he had already suffered all menacing karma in this world. Purgatory or the mortal realm, nothing could frighten him anymore.

Chang Geng: “I'll borrow some people from my yifu.”

Liao Ran stood still, he saw the young Royal Highness make a special gesture towards him. He kicked back his thumb and made a slightly pressing down movement. The wide sleeves of the Prince's clothes flew in the air. The silver line on the sleeves flashed like a silver dragon shimmering on the river.

If the world was at peace, we would enjoy fishing, farming, reading and traveling this vast land.

After a long moment of trembling, Liao Ran put his hands together and made a salute to Chang Geng:

If the age of prosperity was on the verge of collapsing, the abyss near at hand, we will face it, even in thousands of death.

This teaching was called Lin Yuan.

Chang Geng let out a low laugh: "Fake monk."

Then he turned around and ran towards the gate.

Suddenly, Liao Ran's tears came down like rain.

Without knowing suffering, one would not believe in gods and Buddha.

**A reminder that Lin Yuan, the name of their group, means ‘Approaching Abyss’*

Gu Yun had gathered all the meager firepower left of the whole capital together in one place, smashing down the city with all their might. Heavy Armors were on standby at the entrance.

For the first time, Chang Geng saw Gu Yun abandoning the Light Suit and putting on the Heavy Armor. His face with no trace of blood seemed to be cast in the hue of black iron by the Heavy Armor.

Hearing the guards report that *Yan Bei Wang* had come, Gu Yun

turned around, his expression was even worse than when the arrow was pulled out from his body. He stepped forward and grabbed Chang Geng's arm through the steel armor. "Why did you come back?"

"What's the situation?" Chang Geng asked, "The Westerners are impatient. What are you planning to do?"

Gu Yun did not answer, only dragged him down the city wall. His answer laid within the silence — *What else is there? Only defend to death.*

"It's no coincidence what happened to Commander Han, there must be a traitor next to Li Feng," Chang Geng said.

"Yifu, give me a group of soldiers, I will go solve the hidden dangers in the city, otherwise, then when they join efforts from both inside and out, the breakdown of the city is only a matter of time..."

"Chang Geng," Gu Yun completely retracted the regular expression always dyed with a hint of playfulness:

"Your Highness, I will order a group of soldiers to escort you away, you must take good care of yourself on the way, do not come back here again."

Even without the enemies' joint effort, it may only be a matter of time before the city broke down.

Chang Geng lifted his eyebrows, his intuition told him that the 'departure' Gu Yun meant was not only to send him to the city.

Just then, a loud noise came from behind them, heavy artillery of the foreigners smashed onto the city wall. For hundreds of years, the entrance of the city as steady as metal was shaking. The mottled outer wall shattered miserably, revealing the inner foundation and interlocking gears cast by black iron inside, like a face with its skin being peeled off, revealing the horrid flesh inside.

A corpse of a Black Eagle with his head detached fell next to them. Gu Yun took advantage of his Heavy Armor to protect Chang Geng closely in his arms. The collapsed boulders fell behind him. The

broken rubbles splashed continuously onto the surface of the iron armor, the sound ringing nonstop.

They were so close, their breaths almost intertwined. Since Chang Geng had deliberately avoided suspicion, such intimate moments seemed to have never happened again.

Gu Yun's breath was too hot. He wondered if he had a fever, but his eyes were sharp and clear.

"What did the Emperor say to you when he was here?" Gu Yun said quickly in his ear, "Do as he wished, go!"

When Li Feng came over, Gu Yun was still unconscious. They did not even talk face to face.

This pair of ruler and subject, under the false image of peace and harmony for many years, constantly speculating about each other, suspicious, cautious of each other — yet at the very last moment, they both knew what the other was thinking.

Chang Geng's pupil shrank, he suddenly pulled down Gu Yun's neck wearing Heavy Armor, bravely kissing the other's dried and cracked lips.

It was the first time he was able to taste Gu Yun when both sides were conscious. It was too hot, as if it would spontaneously ignite everything, a terrible scent of blood lingered.

Chang Geng's heart was beating fast enough to tear apart, but it was not because of the false pretense of sweetness always spoken of in romantic tales.

His heart seemed to be ablaze with a ferocious wildfire that could destroy the earth and heaven, locked inside his mortal body, almost ready to burst out of this flesh, sweeping across the scene of a fallen country in the present, and in the future.

This moment seemed to be as long as a hundred generations, yet it seemed even shorter than a blink of an eye.

Gu Yun forcibly pulled him off from himself. The strength of the

Heavy Armor was something that could not be resisted by a human.

However, he did not get angry with Chang Geng, nor did he throw Chang Geng aside regardless of reasons.

He only loosened his iron hand almost gently and put Chang Geng down, two steps apart from him.

Cast aside thousands of shackles and the normal order of life, could this burning affection in desperate circumstances move his iron heart?

If he was ready to die on this wall, then would the last person whom he held lips to lips with in this life make him feel that behind him was not a vast emptiness when stepping on the path to hell?

Would this be a consolation?

Or...would it only make him laugh?

At that moment, perhaps no one could get a glimpse of hint on Gu Yun's handsome face.

Chang Geng looked at him and said, "Zi Xi, I still want to go cut off the path of the spy in the city, I won't be able to stay here to accompany you. If something happened to you today…"

When he said this, he seemed to have laughed, shaking his head, feeling that the words '*I will never live alone*' were too weak. It would be laughed at by Gu Yun, but it was not at all false words. Would one tell him to live alone with the Bone of Impurity for the rest of his life?

He did not hate himself to that extent.

Gu Yun took a deep breath and shouted, "Old Tan!"

Tan Hong Fei surged down from the sky.

Gu Yun: "Order a group of Light Cavalry guards to escort His Highness!"

When he finished, he turned and headed directly towards the city wall without turning back.

The rockets on the *baihong* bow rose to the sky in full speed and collided brutally with the incoming Eagle Armors. This was the last batch of rockets sent by the Ling Shu Institute.

The enemy troops used human flesh as a ladder, dead bodies as bridges. One followed after another without care.

A Western Eagle armor used the blown up body of his companions as a cover, brazenly crossed the *baihong* firewall, suddenly hurling an explosive into the city, colliding on the Qi Yuan tower.

The Western Eagle armor was immediately hit by a Black Eagle. The iron wing on the side of the Black Eagle was already broken, thick smoke being emitted. There was no sword or blade on the Black Eagle's body, thus he locked the enemy's shoulder in a dead grasp, both fell from the air together.

Without hitting the ground, the overloaded golden box had burst, the short spark swallowed both the Black Eagle and the Western Eagle.

Perished together.

The 'Zhai Xing Platform' of the Qi Yuan tower rocked twice then collapsed suddenly. At this time, only ruins and debris could be seen in the Grand View of Yunmeng.

The capital with centuries of flourish, with the red wall and gold tiles of eternal dreams, together with broken *liuli*, fell to the ground, ...turning to ash.

The Golden Hall was in a mess, Zhu Little Feet stumbled under Li Feng's legs, crying: "Your Majesty, the Nine Gates will be destroyed soon, Your Majesty must escape! This servant has ordered my adopted sons to prepare the carriage and casual clothes outside the North Gate. There are 130 guards left inside, they will escort Your Majesty to break through the encirclement with their lives."

Li Feng kicked him down with one foot: "Dog servant daring to decide things on your own, go! Bring me the Shang Fang sword!"

When Wang Guo heard these words, he also bowed down together: "Your Majesty please think twice, as long as Your Majesty is safe and sound, the nation will have a place to lean on, the future has not tasted..."

An inner guard held the Shang Fang sword in front of Li Feng. Li Feng drew it, piercing through Wang Guo's official hat.

Li Feng strode out of the hall.

Zhu Little Feet crawled after the Emperor. The six departments and nine branches resembling a herd of sheep in confusion seemed to have found their leader. They could not help but follow Li Feng one after another. On the other side of the Northern Gate, Zhu Little Feet's pair of prostitute sons impatiently called out to him.

Zhu Little Feet shouted: "How dare you!"

After all, he was still a trusted servant of the Emperor. As a few guards hesitated, the two men took this opportunity to rush in. Just then, the head monk of Hu Guo Temple also arrived, a group of people who appeared to be fighting monks followed behind him, walking to Li Feng.

Li Feng's expression seemed to ease up, but before he could greet Master Liao Chi, one of Zhu Little Feet's son suddenly raised his head.

His submissive face was filled with murderous intent. He followed after Zhu Little Feet, just five steps away from Emperor Long An, then opened his mouth and spat out an arrow.

No one could have predicted this scene, everyone was momentarily shocked.

In the blink of an eye, Zhu Little Feet shouted, his plump body rolled over and hit Li Feng hard from behind to prevent a fatal blow. Li Feng staggered a step and almost fell onto Liao Chi. He turned back in anger and looked around, Zhu Little Feet had his eyes wide open, as if he still could not believe that his obedient and filial son would turn into an assassin, his body twitched like a wooden puppet, his breathing stopped before he could make a sound.

Li Feng held his breath. At that moment, he could hear a Buddha's prayer, but before the Emperor had time to mourn, he felt an icy cold hand on his neck. Master Liao Chi's hand hidden inside his sleeve was donning an iron gauntlet, the monstrous hand which could easily crush stones grabbed the Emperor's fragile neck. Shang Fang sword fell to the ground in a clattering sound.

All the officials and guards were shocked. Jiang Chong, a weak scholar with no power, did not know where he could find this much courage. He stepped up and asked, "Head monk, have you gone mad?"

Liao Chi unmasked his usual sorrowful expression and laughed, "Amitabha, this monk is not mad. Master Jiang, back then, Emperor Wu was a man eager for wars, sharpening his black iron sword using the neighboring countries, you were probably not born yet."

Jiang Chong: "What..."

After that, a 'combat monk' took a step forward and said a sentence that Jiang Chong could not understand. Then, several Heavy Armors came out from all directions and stood behind the group of monks.

"Dong Ying people!" exclaimed the nearby ministers.

Liao Chi laughed and said, "That year, Emperor Wu implemented Rong Jin Law, sixteen people of my family died by the hands of the black crows, only I was left, depending on your country. By the light of amnesty given to the world when Old Marquis Gu and the First Princess were married, only then did I regain my freedom. I have since severed ties with the common world, befriended Buddha's teaching, diligently trained for forty-six years, this day had finally arrived."

Li Feng's throat was being strangled, his voice breaking up: "You... you are the descendant of those damn thieves smuggling *Ziliujin* deserving a thousand death that year!"

"Thieves." He repeated without amusement, "Isn't it? It's all because of *Ziliujin* — the Emperor's mouth is hard, your heart is also hard, I don't know if your bones are the same. Please move on to the Red Kite, following this monk for a trip.

Li Feng: "I..."

"The Emperor believes in Buddha's way," Liao Chi said: "It's no different than believing in this monk."

After that, he pushed Li Feng directly onto a Red Kite and ordered people to hang the Dragon flag on the Royal carriage on the kite's tail.

"Cut off the rope and let the Red Kite take off," he said foolishly. "When the news comes out, the Emperor said he was going to flee the city by Kite!"

Jiang Chong: "Courageous thief!"

Liao Chi laughed aloud, "Anyone who wanted to be a sacrificed pawn can come up!"

Just then, a roar suddenly came from a short distance away.

Liao Chi was stunned. He turned around, he didn't know since when Liao Ran had been standing on the ruins of the Zhai Xing Platform.

The mute monk's throat was no good ever since he was small. Even with all his effort, he could only let out an ‘Ah’ sound. Many people who have seen the master have never heard him make a noise. He seemed to always resemble a fresh breeze, face filled with compassion.

He was an abandoned baby picked up by the previous head monk and raised by brother Liao Chi since young. Although his ambition was unlike a monk, sneaking out of the temple at the age of eleven or twelve, traveling across the pugilist world, and later even entered Lin Yuan Pavilion, the feelings of his juvenile years gradually paled but always lingered.

Liao Ran signed to him, "Brother, repent and the shore is at hand."

He gazed at his younger brother he had brought up with a fascinated and complicated look. For a moment, even he could not help the arousing of old affection. He seemed slightly dazed, murmuring, "The river has already dried up. Where could the..."

The word ‘shore’ had not yet been said, a short arrow the size of a palm suddenly emerged from an extremely tricky angle while Liao Chi was distracted, decisively piercing his throat with one shot.

The crowd shouted in unison, only to see a Black Eagle flying close to the ground. Chang Geng was on the Eagle's back, the string of the medium-sized bow in his hands still trembling greatly. Tan Hong Fei was holding a Wind Slasher, sweeping his metal arms, each of them blocking the violent attack of two combat monks.

Jiang Chong shouted, "What are you standing there for, protect the Emperor!"

The guards of the palace immediately charged forward, a group of Black Cavalry rode out of the alley. Li Feng pushed Liao Chi away, the corpse of the monk rolled down from the Kite.

Liao Ran knelt down in the ruins.

A vast nation, a large world, east and west across the sea, north

and south boundless...

Could not let go of a shrine far away from this mortal realm.

The Dong Ying monks and the guards clashed with each other, the Heavy Armor brought by Liao Chi shot an explosive into the sky, Tan Hong Fei directly flew down, Chang Geng landed on one knee with agility. The two men separated, bricks and rubbles flew in the air.

Chang Geng's eyes met Li Feng’s for a moment, taking off the *baihong* bow from behind, he leaned back to gain strength, pulled the iron string to the extreme, bending in the shape of the full moon——

A sharp noise rang out, the arrow precisely struck the golden box of the Heavy Armor.

He then withdrew quickly. The golden box exploded instantly, the heat wave shook the Kite into incessant tremors.

Li Feng reached for the balcony of the Red Kite: "Tan Hong Fei, drive this thing, send me to the city gate!"

Tan Hong Fei was surprised, after a moment of hesitance, he sent inquiring eyes over towards Chang Geng. Chang Geng's gaze slightly lowered, signaling his acquiescence.

The Red Kite carrying the Emperor moved towards the city gate, more than one hundred imperial guards and hundred of officials marched along. On the path from the Qi Yuan tower to the gate, refugees and local people who fled to the capital continuously rushed out from both sides, gathering together like rivers pouring into the vast sea.

At this time, the city gate finally could no longer be sustained. The anti-air net had quieted. The rockets had been used to the bottom.

Gu Yun shouted an order for people to open the city gate.

The Black Iron Camp’s Heavy Armors that had been in waiting for a long time surged out of the gate. Gu Yun made a gesture with

his hand towards the wounded soldiers on the city wall.

The city gate slowly closed behind the Heavy Armors' formation.

Gu Yun pulled down his iron protective mask, all the Heavy Armors behind him followed his action.

Chapter 65: Reborn

T/*N: The title of the last chapter - 绝处 [jué chù] - meaning Destroyed homeland, when combined with the title of this chapter [逢生 - féng shēng] will make up the phrase 绝处逢生 [jué chù féng shēng] which means “to be snatched from the jaw of death”, “to come back from death's door”*

—

...turned out that not only did his goddamn life was not ‘thin’, but it was also as tough as a cockroach, still alive even after being ruined to this point.

—

In the next moment, all Heavy Armors moved.

The ruined walls rumbled in the unbelievable sound of footsteps, a group of black iron armors soaked in the thick snow-white steam that could not disperse in the wind headed towards the enemy's sea of artillery fire like water against the sea current.

The first batch of Heavy Armor resembled a blade that could block everything, sweeping through like a fierce whirlwind, pushing directly into the enemy's line. Heads, bodies, and limbs were exploding into pieces, but strong fire could not burn black iron. As long as the golden box itself did not burst, most of the corpses could still remain upright. The corpses of the officers and soldiers inside were dead, but the mechanical gears were still rotating, as if their souls had not yet dissipated, continuing to rush forward.

When it became difficult to carry on, there would be someone following behind to open the golden box at the back of the black armor and ignite the lead hidden in it.

The officers and men under the iron masks did not differentiate from each other, thousands are united as one. Seasoned commanders were the same as the newly recruited little soldiers in the Northern Camp. They either slayed the enemy's heads with a Wind Slasher in

hands, were under the enemy's artillery, or exploded into a purple firework anonymously.

Li Feng stood on the Red Kite with his arms crossed. He suddenly said to Tan Hong Fei who was ordered to stand on the side, "Where is A Min?"

Tan Hong Fei was suddenly called, he was stunned for a moment then responded, "His Highness Jun Wang had went up to the city wall."

The hot wind blew away the anger on Li Feng's face. Standing amidst this devastation, he gradually calmed down. He threw the Shang Fang sword in his hand to Tan Hong Fei: "Pass on my verbal decree; the national calamity is at hand, the Crown Prince is too young to bear this heavy responsibility. I am inept and incompetent, buried this nation and its people here, unworthy of the ancestors. I want to pass the throne to Yan Bei Wang — it is already too late to make a written decree, you can take this to A Min and escort him away."

Tan Hong Fei: "..."

He grabbed the heavy sword in a hurry, took a glimpse of the ruler's face, sweeping his eyes over the greyed temples of Emperor Long An.

Li Feng waved his hand indifferently.

Chang Geng went up to the wall with his longbow, taking over the aerial battlefield.

Tan Hong Fei landed beside Chang Geng in the roar of *baihong*, carrying with him the Shang Fang sword as if it was a hot potato: "Your Highness!"

Chang Geng knew what he was going to say as soon as he saw him at the corners of his eyes.

Tan Hong Fei: "Your Highness, the Emperor said..."

A wounded soldier with only one leg left came up: "Your Highness, the rockets are all out!"

"If the rockets are all out, change to iron arrows. When the arrows are all out, mount the ownerless Wind Slashers. No need to panic." Chang Geng did not even blink, he speaks bluntly, "We will stay and defend until the wall collapses to pieces — General Tan, you return that thing and tell Li Feng, I do not owe him anything, I do not want to become a lonesome monarch losing their country in his stead."

"Moreover, he is now a battle flag, the two armies are confronting each other. The flag cannot be lacking, the brothers sacrificing themselves are all relying on this flag. Keep a close eye on him, do not let him die easily."

At this moment, at least for General Tan, even ten Li Feng was not as helpful as one Chang Geng, thus he tossed back the Emperor's instruction to the man himself. He made a long whistle and stood guard closely to the Emperor's Red Kite together with several other Black Eagles.

The Heavy Armors under the wall used human flesh to break a blood-soaked path. The roaring explosives and the powerful *baihong* arrows would be rendered useless. The ground became a deadly battlefield, the Western Army was momentarily at a loss and had to place their efforts in aggravating aerial attack.

Countless Wind Slashers that had lost their owners were mounted on the large *baihong* bow. After *Yan Bei Wang* gave the order, the legendary divine weapons praised by the people were fired off without hesitation like iron arrows, the turning and revolving white blades resembling a dandelion, weaving the wind inside then slashing it to pieces, carrying the names of the deceased, surging forward the mass amount of Western Eagles.

Chang Geng wiped the dust-covered *Qian Li Yan* glass with his fingers, then clipped them on his clear cut and straight nose bridge, he ordered: "Mount the second batch of Wind Slashers!"

A young soldier beside him was acting as a self-proclaimed personal guard. After hearing his order, using the teenage voice that had not yet changed, he shouted: "Mount the arrows!—"

He then turned to Chang Geng and asked in a low voice: "Your Highness, what if the Wind Slashers ran out? Shall we throw stones under the city?"

Chang Geng glanced at him, as if with a smile, he said, "Although all the ammunition has been exhausted, thanks to Great Liang's Emperor's accumulation over the years, there are still some *Ziliujun* left inside. If we truly cannot defend the city, then learn from General Han Qi. Splash *Ziliujin* down the wall, burning the capital altogether, the foreigners can't even dream of taking anything from us."

The young soldier shivered from his careless remark.

Chang Geng: "How old are you?"

The young soldier was taken by surprise for a moment and said: "...Eight - Eighteen. "

Chang Geng laughed: "Don't use this trick with me."

The young soldier scratched his head: "...Fifteen. "

Some poor families with too many children, when unable to support them all, they would send half of the children to the army to eat military salary. In fear that they would refuse to take them in if they were too young, the families would lie about their ages.

"Fifteen." Chang Geng whispered, "When I was in my fifteenth year, I followed Marshal Gu to Jiangnan to investigate *Wei Wang*'s rebellion, I did not know anything. You are better than I am."

At that moment, a group of Eagle Armors in the distance took off at the Pope's command.

A Western Eagle held a large explosive, shooting it directly into the city. The large explosives that should be supported by the iron arm of the chariot had a great recoil power, thus as the artillery was shot out, the person holding the explosive on the other end would be repelled to death immediately.

This group of Western Eagles resembled a daring suicidal troop, shooting heavy explosives inside and outside the city wall like rainfall. In the blink of an eye, the city wall immediately collapsed by a half.

The Red Kites were shaken by the waves. Wang Guo who was hugging tightly to the mast, calling for his ancestors, was pushed aside by a panting Zhang Feng Han.

"Your Majesty!" Master Feng Han had already taken off his formal attire, holding a fish bubble in his hand. The fish bubble was filled with *Ziliujin* inside, the shade of deep purple seemingly turning black. He almost famell over due to the trembling of the Kite. A guard beside him was frightened to death, hurrying forward to catch the dangerous object.

Master Feng Han: "Your Majesty, the ammunition is now empty. This old subject had followed His Highness *Yan Bei Wang's* order, transporting all the *Ziliujin* we have left to the city gate. The subordinates had been instructed to place them…"

"Your Majesty be careful!"

"Protect the Emperor!"

Artillery flew towards them, interrupting Master Feng Han's words, grazing past Li Feng's Red Kite. Its corner exploded immediately. It groaned, then leaned to the side.

Another artillery relentlessly pursued after, crashing into the belly of the Red Kite. The Kite lost control under severe damage. Li Feng's pupil shrank into needle-like dots in the midst of the crowd's

shouting.

Tan Hong Fei roared loudly, his wings suddenly opened, as if they could cover the sky.

In that moment, he grasped hold of the artillery, the Eagle Armor was accelerated to the fastest speed. The high temperature and the impact instantly shot the old Black Iron Camp's subordinate who had carried grievances about the old case of twenty years ago, together with the large explosive, becoming a firework that would never return.

...But fortunately, he did not dishonor his mission.

At last, the Wind Slashers that had claimed the lives of countless foreigners on the city wall was all out. Chang Geng looked back at the capital city with not much sentimental attachment, a feeling of pity arose inside him — for the Marquis's manor could not be seen from this distance.

Then he raised the longbow, dipped the tip of the iron arrow in ignition oil, and fired at the enemy in the air. The arrow was lit on fire as the oiled tip traveled at high speed, surging like a meteor — this was a signal.

Master Feng Han pulled up his sleeve: "Red Kites get ready!"

In addition to the Kite Li Feng was on, the last dozen Red Kites in the capital took off, resembling a group of dancers dressed in red, wearing beautiful makeup, moving with light steps onto a mountain of blades, a sea of flame carrying *Ziliujin*, colliding with the Western Eagle Armors coming to find death in the air.

The sky turned grey.

On the wall, Chang Geng was the first to be caught up in the

midst. A meager Light Armor that temporarily hung on his body could not withstand the force surging down. He could feel a strong knock against his chest. His eyes darkened, he coughs up a mouthful of blood, instantly losing consciousness.

The little soldier who had just given orders in his stead shouted and rushed over in an attempt to protect him with his own body.

The wall finally collapsed completely.

Chang Geng did not know how long he had fainted, it had taken him a long time to gradually be able to regain consciousness. He found that his leg was stuck between two broken gears, but the young soldier who protected him just now only had a pair of arms left, severed at the shoulders. His body was gone, becoming a cloak of blood on Chang Geng.

Chang Geng gritted his teeth, feeling that the ache all over him was still tolerable. It was far less painful than an attack of the Bone of Impurity.

Perhaps his ears were already injured, voices far and near could not be heard clearly, very chaotic, very blurred.

Chang Geng thought, *"When Zi Xi didn't take medicine, was his surrounding also became like this? It is quite peaceful."*

The wall already collapsed, did the city break down?

Is Li Feng still alive?

Yes, and Gu Yun...

When Chang Geng thought of Gu Yun, he dared not go on any further, for fear that those two words could take away all his courage. He cut off this thought neatly, curled up his body, fumbled

at the joint of the armor on his legs, pried off the eight locks one by one, and dragged himself out.

There was still one iron arrow behind him. The longbow had not yet been crushed, he could kill one more man.

As long as this breath remained...

Just before Chang Geng pulled his leg out and managed to stand up, a sudden shadow flashed in front of him.

Chang Geng dodged, subconsciously leaned back and instinctively moved the bow in his hand.

A small wooden bird fell down in front of him, split in two by the iron bow, a mass of sea grain paper fell out of its belly.

Chang Geng was stunned.

After, the ever so calm *Yan Bei Wang* suddenly trembled all over. The light paper was laying on the ground, but even after raising his hand twice, he could not manage to pick it up. His five fingers were trembling too much that it was almost impossible to close them. Only then did he realize the iron guards on his arms had already fallen off, the joints of two fingers were dislocated and no longer listened to his command.

He could vaguely hear someone shouting *'the reinforcements are here'*, this should have been the good news everyone had been looking forward to for a long time.

However, Chang Geng's heart did not have time to brew much joy. After the shock had passed, there was the rise of an indescribable fear.

Because only when he was determined to die could he temporarily set aside the fact that Gu Yun might have already been incarnated as molten iron.

The path to the afterlife already planned out was suddenly full of obstacles, separated him on this side. Chang Geng was momentarily in a state of being stunned.

"Big brother!" He vaguely heard a call, and the next moment, a Light Cavalry flew to him. It was Ge Chen, whom he had not seen for a long time.

Ge Chen dismounted, supporting the incredibly miserable Chang Geng, explaining in a stutter: "Brother, when, when - when I received your letter, I happened to be with General Shen, but it was in the Southern Frontier at that time..."

Chang Geng did not listen to even half of his word, interrupting him in madness: "Where is Zi Xi?"

His voice was so faint that Ge Chen momentarily could not catch it: "What?"

Chang Geng forcefully pushed him aside, struggling to stand up, heading towards the direction of the outside of the city without care. There was no telling what had injured his back, there was a large stain of blood, running along his clothing and dripped down, but he himself seemed to not be aware of it at all.

Ge Chen: "Big - big brother? Your Highness!"

Chang Geng turned deaf ears, Ge Chen could see a stray arrow coming towards Chang Geng, yet the man did not dodge. He quickly rushed up in a panic and pulled him out of the way. However, after two steps, Chang Geng's eyes were dyed red as if they could bleed.

Ge Chen shuddered, thinking to himself: *"Not good, did something happened to the Marquis?"*

Ge Chen had always been decisive since he was young. Using his hand, he struck Chang Geng at the neck and knocked him unconscious.

On this day, the ever-stable imperial city experienced the

bloodiest battle in history. The Son of Heaven used himself as a flag, the general died in the flame. All of them had reached their limits. At last, when the wall collapsed, the reinforcements arrived.

The experience and composition of these support forces were very complicated. Shen Yi, the governor of the Southwest, was in command. General Zhong, who had been retired for many years, came forward to fight in his stead. There was also a handful of Jiangnan Navy mixed in — it was the remnants that Yao Zhong Ze gathered after the defeat at the Eastern Sea.

Recognizing that their opportunity had been lost, the Western Army was forced to retreat.

Nearly 40 percent of the imperial officers were buried under the collapsed wall. Li Feng's Red Kite had completely lost control. Shen Yi had no Eagle in his hands, he had to warily shoot steel ropes onto the railings with *baihong* arrows. Mobilizing dozen of Heavy Armors, working their best until midnight, only then did they manage to safely pull Emperor Long An who was suspended in mid-air to land.

Almost all of the Northern Camp, together with its commander, had perished in this battle.

Gu Yun was dug out from the bottom of a Western chariot, several of his ribs were broken. At first, no one dared to move him, for as soon as they did, blood would start gushing out.

At last, General Zhong came to see him personally and dropped a sentence, "He is not going to die so easily. If he does, I'll pay for it." Only then did he send several military doctors to fix him on the wooden stretcher and carried him away.

The whole palace gathered several thousand years old ginsengs, intermittently sustaining his life for three days. He had almost reunited with the Old Marquis several times. At last, Chen Qing Xu had come back from numerous mountains and rivers from outside the border.

She ran to death several horses, and after arriving in the capital, she did not sleep or rest for an entire day. At last, she was able to

recover the Marquis of Order from the hands of the Hell King.

Gu Yun woke up at dusk for the first time. His eyelids could only vaguely feel the light coming through the window lattice. He had not yet been able to open his eyes, yet the sharp pain had already come.

He was not dead, but Gu Yun was not very happy. First, he was startled: *Has the capital been lost? Where am I now?*

As he struggled wildly in confusion, someone grasped his hand.

The person seemed to know of his worries, he leaned in his ear and said: "The reinforcements had arrived. It's alright... the capital is alright."

The familiar scent of tranquilizers wrapped around him, Gu Yun's consciousness could only be sustained for a moment, he then fell into unconsciousness again.

It took Gu Yun several days to fully wake up. The effect of the medicine was long gone, he was once again a blind and deaf who could not see nor hear clearly.

Gu Yun struggled to blink, seeing a blurred figure beside the bed. He could tell it was Chang Geng by the scent.

His mind was full of turmoil, and a lot of questions poured in one after another without care: *How many people were left in the Northern Camp? Where did the reinforcements come from? Whose forces were they? Where did the Western Army retreat to? What happened to the Emperor?*

Chang Geng carefully dipped a little water to feed him. Gu Yun instinctively raised his hand to search around. There was no telling which wound he had moved, his entire body hurt enough to the point of almost fainting.

"Alright, alright," Chang Geng said in his ear, "General Shen is back, Teacher is keeping guard. You should worry less, have some rest."

Gu Yun: "..."

He took a deep breath and calmed down, feeling pain in all organs.

Before, with nothing to do, the Marquis of Order would love to pity himself with Shen Yi, how three generations of Gu family were not fated to have a long life. He always felt that his 'ill and sick body' was destined for 'a tragic end for beauties', turned out that not only did his goddamn life was not 'thin', but it was also as tough as a cockroach, still alive even after being ruined to this point.

Gu Yun opened his mouth, wanting to call '*Chang Geng*'. Unexpectedly, after suffering severe injuries and being unconscious for several days, his throat could not make a sound.

Suddenly, his face was touched by something. Gu Yun felt a hand holding his chin, a finger with a layer of callous gently swept over his lips. There was an indescribable feeling of affection that lingered.

Chang Geng was sitting beside the bed. If Gu Yun could see it clearly, he would find that right now, Chang Geng had only half his clothes draped carelessly on his body, his hair was scattered, his shoulders, neck, arms and even his head were covered with needles, becoming a gentle hedgehog.

He sat stiffly like a log at the bedside, even turning his head took great effort. All emotions on his face were sealed with needles. Could not cry and could not laugh, with no choice, he remained expressionless, becoming a handsome full-sized wooden statue.

Despite this, he still had red in his eyes.

Over the past few days, Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity had attacked several times. Chen Qing Xu had to apply needles to forcibly seal off the toxin and made him into a straw doll.

The doll whispered in the soft tone his half-deaf ears could not

hear, "If this happened once more, I will truly turn mad, Zi Xi, ah."

Gu Yun: "..."

Although he did not hear what Chang Geng said, the touch on his lips reminded him of what happened on the city wall. For a moment, Gu Yun just wanted to howl — who could have thought that he would be able to stay alive to face this matter?

Thus, from his neck down, General Gu stiffened into a tall and upright rod.

Chapter 66: Troubled Times

—

"Hurry, you see, right now everywhere in the court is bleak and gloomy, let's talk about your misfortune for some fun."

—

It was easy to be impulsive. What comes after being impulsive was the problem.

If there was no such catastrophe in the capital, Chang Geng would never have done such bold thing. Before the war, he did not even harbor any unrealistic hope for Gu Yun, otherwise he would have not hidden for four or five years.

Gu Yun was his life-long consolation, but according to the normal development, perhaps it would only end here. He had already expressed his mind to this point. Gu Yun had also used the most gentle and flexible way to respond. With Chang Geng's self-esteem, he would never linger on any further.

What he did and what path he took for Gu Yun, these were his own decisions.

He had a lot of motives, but he did not want to use this against Gu Yun - for it was too cheap.

The two of them would treat this feeling as a kind of an embarrassing secret, continuing for a long time, waiting for Chang Geng to hone himself little by little, until he could joke about this matter, or after a long time, that heartless Gu Yun would forget the matter on his own.

Chang Geng had been used to restraint since childhood. As long as he had not turned completely mad, he would restrain himself until he died.

Desire, especially unrealistic desire, was a very painful thing. Whether it was desire for money, power, or anything else, they were

the shackles on the body. The deeper one was trapped, the tighter one would be bound. This truth was too clear in Chang Geng's mind, thus he dared not indulge for even a moment.

Unfortunately, even if he understood it any clearer, it was useless - it was too late to say anything now.

One wrong thought under the city wall had let him take this step forward, coupled with an absence of response from Gu Yun...

Not mentioning whether Chang Geng could still let go as happily as before when he never had any hope, could Gu Yun's heart continue on as if nothing had happened?

As for General Gu, who was both injured and sick, his head was being stretched twice as much.

He believed that in this matter, his responsibility was greater. He truly felt guilty, because under normal circumstances, Chang Geng would never touch him unless he acquiesced to it.

And even if he had not yet managed to steady himself in the midst of chaos, even if it was an 'accident', his reaction afterwards shouldn't have been to simply let it slide.

In fact, Gu Yun himself could not tell what he had thought at that time. Perhaps there was no time to think about anything. When he closed his eyes, it was as if he could still see Chang Geng's deep gaze on him in the midst of the sound of artillery fire coming down the city, as if in this heaven and earth, those eyes could only contain him.

Nobody, especially men, could be indifferent towards that kind of look.

Gu Yun had one nose and two eyes, he was no special than the others. He also had passions and desires.

He could not simply regard Chang Geng as a close descendant as before, but raising him like a son for so many years, he momentarily could not be accustomed to it.

At this time, Chang Geng slowly bent down, reached out to cover Gu Yun's ineffective eyes, not letting him see his current appearance.

There was not a single part on Gu Yun's body that listened to his command. He could not hear, see, nor speak, and for the first time in his life, he was powerless to someone's disrespectful actions. Dumbfounded, he thought to himself: *"Would he dare bully the wounded? Where is justice!"*

Then he felt a soft breath sweep by his face, and the scent of another person approaching was so close he could hardly ignore it.

Gu Yun: "..."

Mother, this kid truly dare to!

Gu Yun's throat moved involuntarily, but Chang Geng did not do anything. He seemed to stay still for a long time, then kissed the corner of Gu Yun's lips gently.

Gu Yun's eyes were covered, he involuntarily unfolded his rich and sentimental imagination along with the delicate touch. He felt that the boy resembled a small pitiful animal, jumping into his arms after surviving a life threatening situation, giving him a wet lick.

At that time, his heart instantly softened. Although he had no time to ask about the casualties in the army, Gu Yun could already come to a general conclusion. After a moment's thought, he could not help but feel grief.

But even so, Chang Geng could still sit by his bed safe and sound at this moment. To him, this was much like finding something again after assuming it had been lost. Gu Yun suddenly did not want to worry too much, wanting to reach out and embrace Chang Geng. But unfortunately, he could not even lift his hand.

Gu Yun's pity and unspeakable concerns soon inextricably mingled with each other. He could not bear to reprimand Chang Geng. He only wished he could go back to the moment when the city was besieged and slap his past self - *look what you've done!*

"Zi Xi." Chang Geng cried in his ear, Gu Yun's eyelashes grazed

his palm. At this time, it seemed that only by hugging the other, crying and laughing aloud to his heart's content could he vent this continuous panic and fear. Unfortunately, he was also powerless to do so at this moment.

In order to avoid intense emotions from breaking out, Miss Chen had restricted him to the state of having facial paralysis, he could not squeeze out smile with all his strength, thus he had to make a small opening in his mind, letting his feelings flow out like a stream of water.

Gu Yun was badly wounded, there was not enough energy. Even after trying his best to support himself, he soon fell into unconsciousness in the midst of complex emotions.

Chang Geng quietly pulled the quilt up for him, reluctantly watching Gu Yun for a while. It was not until the stiff joints of his body could not endure the torment and made a crisp sound did he slowly stand up holding the bedpost, dragging his corpse-like pair of legs to leave.

As soon as he pushed open the door, Chang Geng saw Chen Qing Xu who had been waiting outside for a long time. She strolled back and forth at Gu Yun's door, the green grass had all been stamped on.

Chang Geng pretended not to see dead grass everywhere and greeted her earnestly. However, due to his wooden look, he seemed all the more sincere and grave: "I have troubled Miss Chen, I don't know what I would do if you hadn't risk danger to come at this time."

Chen Qing Xu absently waved her hand: "It is what I should do. Ah yes, well, Your Highness, wait for me for a moment, I'll perform acupuncture for you... That, that is..."

The tongue of the Chen family woman who was used to every kind of shocking affairs stuttered, her forever dignified sculpted face rarely let out a little hesitation.

The attack of Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity was not known to people. To outsiders, she could only use the excuse that he was seriously wounded and had not yet recovered.

Regarding the matter of using needles to suppress his poison, Chen Qing Xu would not dare to let anyone else do it. Thus she was forced to listen to all of his sleep talks by herself, unluckily putting together a terrifying truth. It had troubled her all night, wrinkles were about to show on her face.

Chang Geng meant to nod to her, but his neck could not be bent. He could only bow, making himself appear more courteous: "No, I can manage it myself. I will have to go to the palace later on, I will not bother Miss Chen."

The capital had one of its wall collapse. Although the siege was temporarily relieved, but what followed after was still a complete mess. Excluding those who could not get up like Marshal Gu, other people dared not relax, their breaths suspended in the middle.

Chen Qing Xu listened and nodded, swallowing back what she intended to ask.

Who knew that at this moment, Chang Geng suddenly said, "But if you want to ask..."

He paused slightly and looked sideways at Gu Yun's closed door. Chen Qing Xu became nervous.

Then His Royal Highness used an immovable coffin face and admitted frankly, "I truly harbor improper thoughts for my yifu."

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

This sentence... to say it aloud in such a frank and calm tone, it was quite magical.

"He also knows of it, Miss Chen please..."

Chen Qing Xu responded unconsciously: "I would not tell anyone!"

Chang Geng put his hands together, his clothes floating lightly over his body. In a graceful manner, he brushed past Chen Qing Xu like a wind fairy stepping on the sky... no one could tell that there was a hedgehog wrapped in it.

If there ever was a moment where Gu Yun would be grateful to Li Feng in this life, it was the next day when he heard that Li Feng had kept Chang Geng in the palace.

That was no greater relief to him. He wished he could write a request to the Emperor to open a single room next to the Warm Pavilion for the prince, for him to stay there for good and never come out.

On the battlefield, injuries were common, Gu Yun had long been accustomed to them. Being able to wake up meant it already passed the most dangerous stage. After another day in bed, he already had enough strength to speak and greet guests.

The first guest he met with was Shen Yi.

Due to Chen Qing Xu refusing to let Gu Yun take the medicine, he could only wear *liuli* glass in a deaf and blind state, beginning the conversation with Shen by shouting and sign language.

The two had separated for more than half a year. When seeing the other off, they were still in high spirits. When they reunited, one of them was lying on the bed, covered in bandage resembling a mummy, could breathe in but cannot breathe out. The other straying, wasting away for a few months, withered like an old turnip planted in the countryside.

Old turnip Shen Yi loudly expressed his sentiments towards Gu Yun: "We all thought we would have to come collect your body. We did not expect to see a Marquis of Order who could still breathe! Marshal, you did not die even at the face of great catastrophe, this truly is a sign of future blessing!"

Gu Yun's face was full of saliva from his 'expressing', anger immediately arose. He could not see where his 'future blessing' was. Regret already piled up to a basketful, he said angrily: "You still have the face to mention that? Goddamnit, those foreigners landed in Da Gu Port for more than a month, burning the Palace in the western suburb like a stove. Where did your good-for-nothing self disappear to? Even a pile of shit has already cooled!"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun: "Get away, stay away from me. Is your mouth broken? Spraying all over my face!"

"I didn't want to mention this to you, for fear of causing you to be irritated." Shen Yi sighed, rolled up his sleeves and sat down beside Gu Yun without care.

"At that time, I did not see any one from the Ministry of War coming to withdraw the Drumming Order, perhaps they were already intercepted as soon as they set foot outside the capital. Those numerous small countries in the Southern Sea resembling pieces of goat's feces took this opportunity for their own gain, there was no telling how they managed to discovered the secret passages left behind by the bandits, they fell right out of the sky during the night. I was caught off guard, letting them explode the supply storage."

Without the Drumming Order, Shen Yi, the newcomer commander, could not mobilize the garrison in Southern Frontier at all.

"I completely had my hands full on that side, suppressing one problem, another one came up. Coincidentally, Xiao Ge also came to find me and brought along a letter from His Highness. At that time, as soon as I read it, I already know it was bad, but unfortunately, I could not clone myself."

Shen Yi shook his head. "Later, the wooden bird sent the Black Tiger Emblem and the Feng Huo Order issued by yourself personally. Although I did not expect for that the capital city would be besieged to this point, I still managed to divide half of the men and *Ziliujin* in stock and personally led the troops back."

The rest of the words, he did not need to elaborate, Gu Yun also understood after hearing this, the problem was *Ziliujin*.

The northwest was entangled by tigers and wolves, the Black Iron Camp and the Northern Defense Army did not dare to move, otherwise not mentioning whether they could defend the country or not, if they were to be slightly careless, they would easily be

surrounded and pursued. At that time, the capital would truly face the Western Navy in the south, the iron armors of the Wolf Tribes in the north.

The trouble from Shen Yi's southwestern side could be easily resolved. The true problem was *Ziliujin*, the stocks of the garrison in the Southern Frontier were already very limited, the remaining amount was not enough to support long-term raids.

"I had to go north first to find General Cai to find food," Shen Yi sighed, "Who would have expected that on the way there, I would be hindered repeatedly? Do you know who is holding the Central Plains garrison back?"

Gu Yun's expression turned grave.

"An insurgent army of refugees." Shen Yi said, "Old Cai's troops were divided more than half by the Black Iron Camp and the Northern Defense Army, only a small amount of troops stayed behind in the Central Plains, struggling back and forth with them everyday. They are only commoners who were forced into a dead end, not beating them would be no good, but directly beating them would not be alright either. Old Cai was too distressed that half of his hair have gone grey."

Gu Yun leaned against the bedhead: "How could it be so chaotic?"

"The problem concerning the riot of unemployed refugees from the area of the Central Plains to the south of Sichuan had always been there, just that before now, it had not reached a higher scale." Shen Yi said. "This time, someone had taken advantage of the situation and persuaded these refugees to form a few forces. Seeing that the country will soon fall into chaos, even the Black Iron Camp can be lost by a half overnight, their courage had also become considerably bigger."

"In fact, you know, Zi Xi, over the years, I have always felt that it is not quite a good thing for the Black Iron Camp to be too renowned and vigorous. Being cautious of by the one above is one thing. On the other hand, there are too many folk tales. In previous years, it can be

used to deter some people with ulterior motives. But once the Black Iron Camp has an accident, even if it is only a blow of the wind, it is too easy to shake the hearts of the army and the people."

The two men were relatively silent for a moment, then Gu Yun said: "Don't talk about this useless insipidity, how is the situation now? How many brothers of the Northern Camp are left?"

Shen Yi's face changed, momentarily not responding.

As Gu Yun saw his expression, his heart turned colder by a half: "Where's Old Tan?"

Shen Yi put his hand on his chest to untie a Wind Slasher under the Light Armor and put it silently beside Gu Yun's pillow.

Gu Yun was stunned for a moment, caught off guard. He accidentally touched a wound, gritting his teeth silently, he huddled over in pain.

Shen Yi reached out to hold him. "No, Zi Xi... Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun waved his hand and said in a hoarse voice: "Where did the Westerners retreat to?"

Shen Yi looked at his face carefully: "After the Westerners broke through the Southern Sea Navy, their troops were divided into two routes. One branch was personally led by the Pope, pressing from Da Gu Port to the capital. The other was mainly comprised of suicidal Dong Ying men they hired by money. They drove their armored chariots up north along the canal and across the two provinces of Zhili, Shandong. Local garrisons had never met with a battle before, they instantly suffered defeat. We had also clashed with them on the way, they truly are hard to deal with. Later, General Zhong appeared in Jiangnan and helped Yao Chong Ze to reorganize the ruined Naval Army and go north to help us. That group of people finally made way and retreated back to Shandong Province.

"As of right now, the Western Army from the two routes had combined into one, returned to the sea, settling down on the areas of Dong Ying Islands. I'm afraid it is not over yet."

Gu Yun's eyebrows tightly frowned, making an *'Mm'* sound in response.

Shen Yi had been shouting incessantly to the point of his mouth turning dry, he poured himself a cup of cool herbal tea, chucking it down and sighed, "Don't think too much, what you should do right now is to rest and heal up completely, nothing can be done without you."

Gu Yun half closed his eyes and said nothing.

In order to ease the atmosphere, Shen Yi shifted the topic and said: "Your little Highness had changed so much. Before, he had hidden his talents ever so tightly, but in the face of a national disaster, he single-handedly stepped up to bear heavy responsibilities. I almost could not recognize him anymore.

"Did you know that the Emperor had taken the word '*Bei*' from his title '*Yan Bei Wang*?'"

Yan Bei Wang to *Yan Wang* - although it was a difference of only one word, it was moving from being a *Jun Wang* to a *Qin Wang**.

A reminder of the statuses from chapter 17: a title of one character was called Qin Wang (Prince). For example, the Second Prince was granted the title of "Wei Wang". A title made of two characters was called Jun Wang - they were slightly lower in status compared to the former, usually separated from the members of the royal family by a grade.

Gu Yun returned to reality and muttered tiredly: "What good would it do... getting promoted now."

In order to cheer him up, Shen Yi directly got to the main sensitive topic: "Just now I saw him coming out of the palace with Chong Ze, they are on the way, perhaps he will soon come back."

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi saw his expression as bleak as the bottom of a pot, he asked, "What happened?"

Gu Yun's body was sore all over from lying on bed for too long.

He wanted to change his posture, but it was inconvenient to move. That old maid Shen had sharp vision, but as he saw him struggling hard at the head of the bed, he did not even come up to help but continued the incessant chatter: "In the first few days, when you were playing chess with old man Hell King, His Royal Highness had watched over you all day and night without resting, regardless of his injuries. His body was covered in needles, even his neck cannot be bent, we all could not bear to look. I'm telling you Zi Xi ah, he is even better than blood-related..."

Gu Yun had no patience left, grumpily interrupting: "Blood-related my ass, where do you find so much bullshit? Get out of here!"

Instead of being frightened, Shen Yi even approached with his face held high and pressed on: "Why, what unfortunate deed did you commit to offend the other? I'm telling you Zi Xi, His Highness is not the child you can bend and mold however you please anymore, you're almost..."

Gu Yun whispered: "Brother Ji Ping, please consider how I had nearly sacrificed myself for the country and go away."

Shen Yi keenly caught the words 'a difficult to express ordeal' written on his face.

General Shen had been bullied by Gu Yun for many years, he could not win against him, nor could he talk against him, a long history of hatred had built up. It was difficult to finally be able to laugh at him, there was no chance he would let go of it easily, his curiosity was about explode. "Hurry, you see, right now everywhere in the court is bleak and gloomy, let's talk about your misfortune for some fun."

Gu Yun: "..."

Thus there was no more sound in the room, two people who were shouting at each other started exchanging words through sign language.

After a period of an incense, Shen Yi carried the expression as if he had been struck by lightning, rigidly flying out of Gu Yun's room.

Speaking of the devil, the devil arrived. Coincidentally, His Highness *Yan Wang* had also returned, meeting with Shen Yi face to face.

Chang Geng greeted him: "General Shen had come, how is my yifu doing?"

Shen Yi: "..."

In the face of Chang Geng, General Shen, the governor of the Southwest, changed through several expressions. At last, not even a fart could be let out. As if seeing the devil, he hugged the wall and disappeared.

Chapter 67: Wine Offering

—

Yan Wang Li Min restructured the defense of the capital and acted as a leader of the six ministries, beginning his career of being a 'pillar', demolishing the east wall to make up for the west wall.

—

When Chang Geng pushed the door in, he saw Gu Yun leaning against the bed with a mottled blade across his knee and an indescribable loneliness present on his pale face.

Although he could not hear the sound of the door, as soon as Gu Yun felt the breeze coming in from outside, he immediately withdrew his expression in a twinkle of an eye: "How did you come back to..."

He thought it was Shen Yi who returned again after leaving, but as he looked up through the *liuli* glass and saw clearly who had came in, he choked his words back.

Gu Yun's hand made an undetectable motion of touching General Tan's Wind Slasher: *"It's over,"* he thought: *"Is it too late for me to pretend to faint now?"*

By the conscience of heaven and earth, this was the first time in his life that General Gu wanted to escape from fright.

But the world has no conscience.

Chang Geng went straight to him, as if nothing happened, grasping Gu Yun's hand, putting his finger on Gu Yun's pulse and quietly checked it for a while.

This time, the half-blind Gu could finally see him through his glass. After a few days, Chang Geng had became noticeably thinner, his lips were a slightly pale green, which was the kind of green when someone could not breathe or was poisoned. His outer expression

seemed as if it was forced out, the inside was only a hollow shell.

Gu Yun's embarrassment faded, he frowned. "Where did you get hurt? Come here, let me see."

"It is nothing, although Miss Chen claims she had not graduated, she is indeed a medical expert of our times." Chang Geng paused and said, "As long as you're alright, I will be, too."

Chang Geng would never concentrate his energy and scream like Shen Yi. His finger was still on Gu Yun's vein, thus he could not sign it to him. Gu Yun basically could not hear many words in this sentence, the only thing he could receive was that attentive gaze.

Gu Yun: "..."

What did you say, kid?

The next moment, Chang Geng's hand slid down his wrist and held Gu Yun's hand very naturally.

After serious injury or illness, people often lacked energy and blood. Even in May and June, it was easy for their hands and feet to be cold. Chang Geng held his hand in his palm and massaged it repeatedly, his appearance very serious. Not only did he take care of every acupoint on his hands, he also took care of the most sensitive areas between the fingers, often sweeping by them lightly with his own finger to remind Gu Yun clearly and boldly —— *I am not being filial to you, but I am loving* you, don't deceive yourself.*

**the character used for 'love' here is 疼(téng) and not 爱(ài).*
疼(téng) denotes a much broad term for love,
and not just referring to the romantic kind.

Gu Yun: "... Are you finished taking advantage of your yifu?"

Chang Geng looked up at him and laughed. He was very handsome, a special kind of handsomeness of those with mixed foreign blood. His sharp edge was somewhat inhumane. However, his temperament was rather extremely peaceful. If donning a robe, he could pretend to be a monk to fool others. Contradictory yet seamlessly suppressing that inherent sharp edge he was born with,

when he laughed, he seemed quite sweet.

Gu Yun was dazzled through the *liuli* glass for a moment — when a person's mentality began to change, their perspective would also involuntarily change.

He had to admit that for a moment, his desire was indescribably shaken.

Gu Yun was not an old monk, his desire could be shaken at any time. Although he was not the type to let loose, he also knew that the main reason was that he did not have the luxury to, it wasn't because he did not want to. Thus, it wasn't right to pretend to be completely upright.

But after all, this was not just any body, it was his small little Chang Geng.

Gu Yun truly could not bear to pluck this 'flower'.

As his meager bits of conscience stood in a line to denounce him, Chang Geng suddenly reached out without warning to untie his clothes.

Gu Yun instinctively hid away, instantly gritting his teeth in pain.

Chang Geng earnestly brought the medicine on the side and signed teasingly, "I'm only changing your bandage - I am not an animal."

In fact, Gu Yun was more worried about he himself being the animal here. He came back to his senses, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, thinking to himself: *"How did it come to this?"* For a moment, he could not help but let out a laugh, as soon as he did, the action moved the bones that had not healed yet at his chest and stomach. He could neither laugh nor endure, it was indescribable.

Chang Geng hurriedly said, "Alright alright, I won't disturb you anymore, don't mess around."

He dared not jest at Gu Yun again, temporarily bringing out the

solemn attitude of a doctor. He carefully untied Gu Yun's clothes and changed his bandages. After a moment of tossing and turning, they both broke out in a sweat.

Chang Geng wiped Gu Yun's body with a piece of silk, as skilled as if he had done it many times. Gu Yun thought of Shen Yi's words for a moment. His face was slightly astringent, he said softly: "How can you do this kind of thing yourself? It is not suitable."

Chang Geng's eyes grew dim, he approached his ear and said, "Nothing is unsuitable. You are still here safe and sound to talk to me now, you can tell me to do whatever."

He was too close to Gu Yun's ears, his ears felt numb, but there was no way to hide from him. If he did, he would not be able to hear him.

Gu Yun sighed: "It was difficult for you that day..."

"Don't mention it," Chang Geng interrupted him in a sullen voice. "Don't make me think of it again, Zi Xi, please have pity on me."

Gu Yun was still not used to this type of pronunciation yet, his lips moved slightly, but it seemed that he had no face to ask Chang Geng to call him 'yifu' anymore. Just for a moment, Gu Yun wanted to bring up the matter under the city wall that day to talk about it directly - although he could not help his heart, what were they going to do about the future?

Would he let Chang Geng go astray and cut off his lines of children and grandchildren?

Even though Gu Yun, a veteran soldier, did not pay any mind to their father's and son's status from the past, but for Yan Wang to commit himself to another man, what would people in the court and the pugilist world think of him in the future?

No - even if Chang Geng was not the descendant of royalty, even if he was only an ordinary commoner, with this abilities and wisdom to withstand the storm, how could Gu Yun let him suffer humiliation because of him?

Unfortunately, as the cold-hearted words came to his mouth, they were blocked by Chang Geng. Gu Yun missed another opportunity to get them out in time.

Chang Geng leaned on his shoulder, avoided Gu Yun's wounds, and held him for a while. It took a long time for him to suppress his anxiety. He felt that perhaps he should go to Miss Chen for acupuncture. These two days, he could not suppress his Bone of Impurity. Sooner or later, something would happen if he went on like this.

Chang Geng calmed down and reluctantly retreated. "It is not too hot today, the sun is not bad. Would you like to go sit outside? It would be good for your injury."

Gu Yun: "...What? "

Chang Geng repeated through sign language.

Gu Yun thought for a moment then made a firm response: "...No."

He had no objection about sunbathing, but he knew that he could not use his own legs to stroll for at least a day or two - Gu Yun did not want to know at all how Chang Geng was planning to get him out.

"Did you not like to be in a stuffy house?" Chang Geng said in sign language.

Gu Yun said: "I like it now."

Chang Geng seemed to have no choice but to put the medicine down, get up, and walk away.

Just when Gu Yun thought he had successfully kicked him out, Chang Geng returned with a thin blanket, wrapped it around Gu Yun, then took his little yifu who was unable to resist, smoothly carrying him out of the door.

Gu Yun: "..."

Are you going to rebel?

At this time, Shen Yi who fled in a hurry, did not feel reassured. Feeling completely at a loss all the way, he finally turned back. Unexpectedly, he bumped into this situation. He trembled and tripped on the threshold of the Marquis's manor.

Chang Geng was startled for a moment, then, without blushing or gasping, he asked, "Did General Shen forget something?"

Shen Yi laughed dryly, got up and wiped the dust on his body. He wanted to cover up and erase half of the footprints that he had tripped on. "Don't worry, I only forgot the footprints... haha, um, well... I will not bother anymore."

After that, the traitor turned around and fled, fearing that Gu Yun would kill him.

The courtyard already had a chair for lying laid out. Chang Geng put a furious Gu Yun down, pulled General Tan's Wind Slasher out of his hand and put it on the tea table beside the chair. He laughed and said, "What's wrong? One New Year's Eve when I did not want to go out, didn't you carry me out the same way in front of everyone?"

Gu Yun said expressionlessly: "... So all you salted fish came to life today and lined up to take your revenge on me."

Chang Geng laughed aloud.

After laughing, he brought out something from his sleeve and put it in Gu Yun's hand: "For you."

Gu Yun felt something cold at the touch. He pushed up the *liuli* glass clipped to his nose slightly and saw that it was a white jade flute. The whole piece was carved from very fine jade. It was shaped like a small Wind Slasher. The hand grip, the pattern and the path for the blade were all mimicked vividly. The word 'Gu' was carved at the end.

At first glance, Gu Yun thought that the character was carved by himself, it truly could be used to replace the real deal.

"Perhaps the bamboo one had already been lost, right?" Chang Geng said. "The weather is dry in the capital city. It will crack after a

long time. That time, I have said that I will make a better one for you."

Gu Yun gently rubbed the jade flute, he appeared a little ecstatic: "I actually do not have a Wind Slasher engraved with my name."

Chang Geng sat down in front of him and meticulously prepared the tea. The porcelain pot emitted thick steam. He cleansed three cups, one for Gu Yun, one for himself, and one for Tan Hong Fei's Wind Slasher.

"Even Shen Yi has it, I was the only one who doesn't have. When I was young, I always thought the Black Iron Camp was the shackle imposed on me by the Old Marquis, it was the reason why I could not be free in this life."

When he grew up, he felt that the black iron rod engraved with his name was like a silent suicide note. Gu Yun had no father, no mother, no wife, no son, and no burden. In this vast world, there was no one to leave this suicide note to. He felt an indescribable loneliness and exhaustion of his ambition just by holding it in his hand ——

In the face of Chang Geng, Gu Yun swallowed back the latter sentence, he ordered: "All complaints are simply ignorance of youth. Just listen and don't speak out so as to avoid shaking the army's heart — Old Tan that crazy buffalo would not drink tea, do you have wine?"

"Mm, I've already forgotten it." Chang Geng said, "No wine. General Tan drinks tea, you drink water, the two generals please make do."

Gu Yun: "..."

He found that Chang Geng was more and more careless towards him.

"In the past two days, I had checked with the Ministry of Housing," Chang Geng poured two cups of tea and a cup of water, gesturing, "The Western palace stock was burned by Commander

Han, the loss of the city guard was astonishing. The supply in the north had been cut off. I'm afraid it will be difficult for us to carry on like this. Li Feng had asked me about your opinion."

It's amazing that such a large court, when it comes to war, there were neither money or resources when there were demand for them.

"No opinion, only a cease-fire." Gu Yun stretched out his hand and spinned the cup. "The Westerners are actually far worse off than us. Not only the land and sea armies besieging the capital, but also the machines and armors they supplied to the eighteen border areas and the countries of the Western Regions. Fighting until this point and returning empty-handed, it is not something to be proud of, there is no chance they are doing better than us."

"The Western troops withdrew from the sea, but they will not give up easily." Chang Geng said, "To pay such a heavy price for naught, even if they return home, the Western Pope would not be able to explain himself. They have to fight until death. They are now returning to Dong Ying Islands to rest. If they send troops to Jiangnan and confront the court, from the south to the north, we will be in a very passive position."

Great Liang was so big yet the court was so poor, it was too easy to gain some then lose some.

"Um... If it does not work, send someone to the Western Regions. Our relationship with Lou Lan had not reached the state of betrayal in the end, as long as we are not being hated by friends, try to smuggle some." Gu Yun said, carelessly lifting the small cup with three fingers, looking at 'General Tan', he downed the cup and said "My Brother, His Highness *Yan Wang* does not have wine, he told us to make do. I can not manage him, you must also make do."

Chang Geng silently made a toast with the cup of tea towards the owner-less Wind Slasher, drank it, then poured Tan Hong Fei's cup on the ground.

Using tea in place of wine, making a wine offering for peace.

True to Chang Geng's words, ten days later, the Western Army abandoned the capital city, shifted its direction and landed again at Jiangnan. In two days and one night, it had rushed into Lin An City. The land of rich fish and rice for generations fell. Every large rich families were in a panic, a number of them had already gathered their jewelry and treasures to flee. Some of them resisted. Unable to win, they had taken their own lives after being captured.

Li Feng put old General Zhong back to use. The veteran once again donned his armors, going to the frontline with Yao Zhen and the remaining soldiers he managed to scrape together.

Gu Yun struggled to get up and hurriedly met with the teacher whom he had not seen for many years. There was no time to talk much. Using a cup of wine outside the city to bid farewell to the Southern Expeditionary Army, he watched the old general with gray hair mount his horse and depart.

The next day, the Marquis of Order and Shen Yi went to the northwest together.

Yan Wang Li Min restructured the defense of the capital and acted as a leader of the six ministries, beginning his career of being a 'pillar', demolishing the east wall to make up for the west wall.

Chapter 68: Poisoned

T/N: I apologize for the delay in updating, this is quite a long chapter and was a bit more challenging.

—

Talk not of the glories of awards and nobility,
My heart is as bright as crystal ice in the jar of jade

—

Gu Yun sat properly on his horse's back and asked: "Is he still there?"

Shen Yi raised the *Qian Li Yan* in response and looked back: "Yes."

Gu Yun left the capital in a beautiful day, it was a rare occasion with sunlight spreading for ten miles. Emperor Long An led a hundred civil and military officers to see them off, sending them to the city gate, watching until the figures of men and horses vanished from sight before dispersing. *Yan Wang* was the only one who had not left.

He climbed up the only remaining watchtower on the collapsed gate and watched the figure of the Black Iron General without moving, seeming as if he would stand until the end of the earth and heaven.

Gu Yun did not look back, but said to Shen Yi, "How far have we gone already? Even the *Qian Li Yan* should not be able to see clearly anymore. You should stop talking nonsense."

Shen Yi angrily said, "If you think my eyesight is bad, then look for yourself. Keeping on ordering me time and time again, other people would assume there is something shady between me and His Highness."

Gu Yun had prepared a handful of excuses: "You try to turn around when being wrapped in iron, so much nonsense."

Shen Yi sneered, not bothering to reveal him.

"Would I be already at that extent?" Gu Yun paused, then answered his own question: "Don't use your meager old maid's heart to measure this vast general's heart of mine that could contain thousands of ships."

There was a saying: it takes a hundred days for bones to knit and tendons to heal. Gu Yun was dug out of the heap of dead bodies. Counting both when he was dead and alive, it had not been more than half a month. Let alone an individual, even if the steel armor suffered severe damage, it would not be easy to be fixed this quickly. When Gu Yun requested to go to the northwest, *Yan Wang* had turned furious and almost quarreled with him in front of the ministers.

Even Li Feng the half wit emperor, who 'did not feed the cattle, but only let them work', felt somewhat concerned.

But at this time, there must be someone to reorganize the Black Iron Camp.

The Westerners were not able to encircle the capital. In a half-dead state, they occupied the south of Changjiang. They must have had no spare energy left to take care of their poor allies. The northwest side now had the allied troops of the Western Regions and Eighteen Tribes of Northern Man. They could not be regarded as monolithic. If they could reverse the war situation in the northwest and solve the most pressing problem of *Ziliujin* at the present, then fighting the Westerners back to their home was only matter of time.

Gu Yun had to go in person. A thousand troops were easy to get, one general was hard to obtain.

At last, Chen Qing Xu came out to solve this dilemma. She came up with a fascinating idea — to use a special steel plate produced at top speed by the Ling Shu Institute. It could be tightly fastened on the body to secure Gu Yun's bones that had not healed. In this way, it was as if she had made a set of artificial steel bones and frame for him.

Although putting it on did not feel quite good, it guaranteed that

he still appeared as if he could still move about naturally.

Shen Yi sighed, "I'm telling you, Marshal, hurry and sink back your vast heart. What are you going to do?"

Gu Yun concentrated on floating the boat in his heart, acting deaf and blind.

Shen Yi saw that the man was using this trick again. He immediately took a deep breath and raised his voice. He shouted: "I'm telling you Marshal, *Yan*... Hey!"

Gu Yun flipped his hand and gave him a lash. Shen Yi dangerously placed the Wind Slasher in front of his chest. His eyes widened, continuously patting his chest. "How dangerous, almost ruining my face - hey, Marshal, you have already grown angry from embarrassment after only a few serious words? Even though Master Liao Chi is a spy of Dong Ying, but his sandalwood fart is not totally unreasonable. I think your fate is truly sturdy*, the Red Phoenix star* could not fly even with wings. But now that it finally was able to take off for once, yet all you bumped into are rotten peach blossoms."

**referring to someone who were born on unlucky day, whose fate counter their loved ones*
**the luckiest star in legends, in charge of the joyous occasion related to wedding.*

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi pursed his lips, feeling that Gu Yun's neck might truly be difficult to twist, otherwise he would have rushed over to beat him already.

Gu Yun took back his whip, remaining silent for a moment then shook his head. "The country is almost on the verge of perishing. What else can we do? Being alive for another day is good enough, perhaps this body would one day be wrapped in horse leather. What would be the point in thinking so much?"

Shen Yi frowned at his words. He understood Gu Yun very well. If

Gu Yun truly had no feelings at all, he would have said it straight away. There would never be any ambiguity. At present, listening to him, perhaps not uncertainty, it was better to say that his heart had already leaned towards one side. It was only because of a few concerns that he temporarily had not expressed it outward yet.

Shen Yi: "Hold on, Zi Xi, you wouldn't..."

Gu Yun: "We are not speaking of this matter anymore."

Shen Yi: "That is your son!"

Gu Yun: "Would I still need to hear this nonsense from you!"

Shen Yi's expression was frightened, Gu Yun impatiently looked away.

Not seeing this old maid, he had missed him greatly, but as soon as he was here, he felt that the man was too bothersome. Gu Yun simply ushered his horse and rushed away from Shen Yi's side. He took out a white jade flute in his arms and started to play a choked up tune.

No musical instrument could produce a decent sound in the hands of Gu Yun. He was now fixed in between steel plates, there was not enough breath. His voice was a little shaky. The fingers on the flute's holes were left running like a wild horse, the tune was all over the place, it should have sounded amusing.

But at this time, the sound of the flute was swept in the wind, wrapped in the sigh of the one departing from west of Yang Pass*, unexpectedly twisting into an unspeakable feeling of desolation. No one was able to laugh.

**referring to the poem entitled "Seeing of Yuan'er on a Mission to Anxi" by Wang Wei(701-761), translated by Bill Porter. The full line is "West of Yang Pass there's no one you know", and it is a farewell poem, hence the unspeakable desolation.*

Gu Yun's waist and back are fixed straight by Miss Chen's steel plate — like a beam that will never collapse — with two damaged Wind Slashers on his back... none of them were his own.

Chen Qing Xu who was accompanying the army listened to the flute echo far and near from behind. She whispered her sentiment, "Talk not of the glories of awards and nobility*..."

"Talk not of the glories of awards and nobility," Gu Yun flew past her, his next words completely going off tangent. "My heart is as bright as crystal ice in the jar of jade*, ha ha ha."

Chen Qingxu: "..."

Being interrupted, she could not remember the second verse for a moment!

**from the poem 己亥歲二首 by Cao Song, The next verse was "A general's victory is built upon ten thousand rotting bones."*
** from the poem 芙蓉樓送辛漸 by Wang Chang Ling. This line has all along been considered a masterful line to express a pure and noble heart*

Gu Yun marched like the wind. With the medical expert, Miss Chen, accompanying them, there was no concern about the steel plate coming off. Having just left the territory of Zhili, they had already been attacked by two waves of insurgent groups. Neither one were large scale, scattering instantly, running away as soon as there was contact like several wild probing dogs.

"Just after leaving the capital city, we were already being tailed." Shen Yi said to Gu Yun, "I had dealt with them before, they are cunning and are familiar with the territory. They would flee the moment they realize they could not win, then would soon cling to their opponent again. It was very annoying. I heard about the news of the seige in the capital when I came here. In such a rush, I was furious about their clinginess."

Gu Yun replied with an 'ah' and handed Shen Yi his *Qian Li Yan*. "I'm afraid their amateur strategist had studied for a few days."

Shen Yi: "What?"

Gu Yun: "I've heard that when pretending to retreat, it's necessary to be in disorder, severing your own flags to trick the opponent into

chasing after. Unfortunately, those soldiers failed to grasp the spirit. The flagpole was cut by themselves. I saw it just now."

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun frowned and said: "What are those people rebelling for, do you know? Cannot afford to live any longer?"

"Not at all," said Shen Yi with a sneer, "You think too well of these vagrants. Even if there is no job, most of the good people will open small businesses or learn a craft, it is not at the extent where they would not be able to survive. These vagrants from the Central Plains to Sichuan are just idle hoodlums, who are then grouped together by someone with intentions. Besides harassing General Cai, they are usually engaged in the business of robbery. They would run as soon as the army chases them, and will come back after things calmed down a little.

"I've heard that besides robbery they also had one rule. If an adult man of the family follows them in rebellion, the family will no longer be attacked by thieves. Their wives, daughters, and sisters can also be protected. There is no need to worry about being robbed from time to time."

"..." Gu Yun said: "Slow down, this sounds familiar. Isn't it the same as the slavery system of Great Liang? Military households do not have to pay taxes."

Shen Yi could not bear it: "Marshal, which side are you on?"

"Alright alright, don't be angry," Gu Yun said. "In this way, aren't there more and more bandits? Not only is it tax-free, but there's a team of people following them, it is also possible to avoid conflict. Who is the leader?"

"They say that he is an old bandit who appears very terrifying. He has been working in this business for many years. His body was covered in scars, even his face was burnt in the past, he calls himself 'Huo Long'." Shen Yi sighed and said: "What do you think we should do? Should we quickly travel for two days to get around the mob and go directly to General Cai's northwest reinforcement station?"

Gu Yun strolled for a moment with his hands behind his back. "There are both internal and external troubles, let's resolve anything we can. There are wolves and tigers in front, there can not be any worry at the back. Think up a report and send it to the Grand Council. Say that we would be here for three or five days."

After the siege of the capital city was lifted, Li Feng immediately abolished the two ministers left and right sitting idly and eating wage. Then, in order to make it easier to manage, he imitated the official system of the former dynasty, setting up the 'Grand Council'*, leading the six Ministries, and initiating a number of scholarly Ministers who could now show their true skills in time of troubles.

**The Grand Council (军机处; literally Office of Military Secrets, or Military and Political Affairs Office) was an important policy-making body during the Qing dynasty ^^*

In the Grand Council, the lights were always bright even deep into the night. When Jiang Chong pushed the door in, it was already the third period of the night watch*. The steam lamps were as bright as day, but *Yan Wang* had fallen asleep on the table with a brush still in his hand.

**from 11:00pm to 1:00am*

Jiang Chong did not want to alarm him. He personally took over the stack of reports held by a servant, then dismissed all the underlings and gently stepped inside. But after all, he was a civil officer — he was not well-versed in concealing the noises of his movement.

Chang Geng was startled awake by him. The moment his eyes opened, red marks flashed across the eyes of the usually exquisite *Yan Wang*, like a ferocious light filled with murderous intent, suddenly surging at the person in front.

Jiang Chong was not able to react yet cold sweat had broken out immediately, like a rabbit locked in the killing intent of a beast. He

involuntarily stepped back. The large sleeve dragged down Chang Geng's brush holder and it fell over immediately.

Only then did Chang Geng sober up, and in an instant, his murderous aura was taken back as swift as a scattering cloud. He stood up and said: "No problem, I'll clean it up myself."

Jiang Chong looked at him in horror and wondered if he was confused just now, that his eyes deceived him due to exhaustion. He carefully asked, "Did Your Highness have sleep paralysis?"

"It is nothing." Chang Geng casually said, "My chest was pressed... did my unsightly expression frighten you? I am usually a little hotheaded when woken up. I fell asleep for a while just now, I almost didn't know where I was."

As he said so, Jiang Chong could not ask any more questions. He felt that His Highness' hotheadedness after being awakened was a bit too extreme.

Chang Geng tidied up the brush holder he had knocked down and asked, "Why, did Brother Han Shi had any business?"

Jiang Chong returned to his senses and sat down opposite him. "Due to what Your Highness said at the court meeting yesterday about issuing '*Feng Huo* tickets' to the people, there was a commotion in the court. The court borrowing money from the civilians, this is something that had never been seen before. Would it not be equal to declaring to the world that our treasury is empty? Where would the court's dignity be?"

Chang Geng seemed to have not completely woken up, sitting in a chair and pinching his forehead incessantly. As he heard this, he laughed and said: "Losing half of the the nation, would this be dignity?"

Jiang Chong: "Others have asked what if the court was not able to pay the people back when the time comes, Your Highness is aware of the state of the treasury as well."

"Separate the repayment periods, then issue the second and third

batches. We can borrow from them for now, we will be able to find a turnaround in the end," Chang Geng said. "The first group of people who buys the *Feng Huo* tickets can have some appropriate benefits, such as false titles and vacancies in the court, special permits... all are possible. Ideally, if this is carried out, the people can use the *Feng Huo* tickets as currency."

"If that will be the case," Jiang Chong hesitated, "Won't those tickets fly all over the sky? They are bound to be worthless."

Chang Geng: "After the court regains its strength, we can buy them back. Whether it be paying back the money or retaining the tickets, whether it be setting up special systems or law promulgation, these are all matters of the future."

Jiang Chong nodded, then said again: "Others are asking, what if in the future, someone will create counterfeit tickets and come to the court with false tickets to ask for money?"

Chang Geng was angered by this remark to the point of letting out a laugh: "Tell them to bring this matter to the Ling Shu Institute. Should such details be brought to the Grand Council? Shall we discuss about the proper regulation for using the toilet tomorrow?"

Jiang Chong laughed bitterly: "That is the truth, but Your Highness also knows how those imperial censors are... there is nothing that they do except quarrelling. I heard that they are now writing their reports all night to reveal your wrongdoings."

Chang Geng sighed, "Speaking of thousands of ideas, this is only a solution to resolve this urgency in wartime. Otherwise, what else can we do? Should we start imposing heavy taxes on the city's refugees, or should the Emperor's palace be torn down into parts and be sold for money? If there are any questions, feel free to bring them up in the court session. If I could, I will answer right then. If it is something still unclear, I will go back to think carefully then provide a reply later, these people..."

This was the current state of the court, where only a small group of people were responsible for handling affairs, while most of the others were responsible for causing troubles and hindering. If something

succeeded, they would praise themselves for their own thorough calculation. If anything were to fail, they would say: "Why didn't you all listen to me at that time?"

Not to mention, there were also people who were harboring their own ideals and who had powerful relations causing troubles, becoming a stumbling block, and wanting to do something became more difficult than flying to the heaven... no wonder that even everyone knew the principle of 'listening to all sides in order to form a thorough idea' yet the most common practice in history was it would always be the dictatorial Emperor and the powerful ministers who were running the imperial courts.

"This was not aiming at you, Brother Han Shi, don't take it to heart," Chang Geng waved. "I have been arguing too much lately, I can be a little impetuous."

"Speaking of Ling Shu Institute, Master Feng Han sent two more requests yesterday. This humble official had taken the initiative to withhold them first. Your Highness, please look over them to see if they can be sent out."

Chang Geng poured himself a cup of herbal tea that had already cooled overnight: "Ah, what did he say?"

"One is for the Emperor to revoke the decree and lift the ban for the Mechanics of the common folks. The other is for the Emperor to lift the ban on the people's *Ziliujin* trade. He had said that the wealthy businessmen must have their own way. The national crisis is at hand. It is better to make full use of these people, so that the *Ziliujin* stock of Great Liang can have many sources."

Chang Geng paused, then shook his head: "Master Feng Han...tch, this Master Feng Han."

The old man stepped up to the battle when the capital was besieged, his brave spirit had left a strong impression on Li Feng. Although his temperament was annoying, being hard-headed and stubborn at the same time, but his loyalty was unquestionable. Thus recently, whatever nonsense he might speak of, Li Feng would tolerate them all.

"Everyone can look over the request for the withdrawal of the ban on mechanics. If there are no major problem, send it out." Chang Geng said, "Forget about the *Ziliujin* matter. Is it so comfortable uprooting the Emperor's dragon scales? Be flexible, help Master Feng Han summarize the main focus then forward the request. Return the original version to him."

Jiang Chong responded reluctantly and was about to stand up to leave, then he seemed to have remembered something - he turned around and said, "That's right, there is also the Marquis of Order..."

Chang Geng suddenly looked up.

Li Feng had returned Black Iron Tiger Emblem to Gu Yun and gave him the power to deploy the forces and war supply of all four sides. It was reasonable that he did not have to report all the major and minor events along the way in detail. However, Gu Yun did not accept this special treatment and instead regularly made reports. Where he went, what was the situation, what he planned to do, and for what reasons were listed in details.

Jiang Chong: "The Marquis of Order had just arrived in the Central Plains area, there is nothing too serious. He only said that he met a group of bandits and insurgents, and that he planned to take care of it properly before leaving. It will take no more than three or five days."

Chang Geng made an 'Mm' sound in response: "Leave it here for me to have a look."

Jiang Chong could not help but praise him: "Everything from major to trivial matters are all laid out in front of Your Highness. When it is about other people, you only listen to the briefing. Only Marshal's reports are carefully looked at from beginning to end. The feelings between Your Highness and the Marshal are truly deep."

After finishing his words, he was about to bid his goodbye and leave, but as soon as he reached the door, Chang Geng suddenly called him: "Brother Han Shi."

Jiang Chong turned around: "Does Your Highness have any other

instructions?"

Chang Geng put his hand on Gu Yun's report, unconsciously rubbing it gently. He was silent for a moment, then said without hesitation: "I am sorry to trouble you, but do help me collect the objections about the *Feng Huo* tickets from the officials on the court, who said them, when did they say them, and what they said. I will revise the plan as appropriate."

Jiang Chong was shocked — would it be necessary to hear about 'who' and 'when' for revising the plan? He could not help looking at *Yan Wang* through the steam lamp shining all night. His face clearly belonged to a young man, but his eyes did not have the slightest hint of being a novice. At first glance, he would think that he was an elegant man of nobility. At second glance, he discovered that his eyes were not all that peaceful, but instead leaked a hint of coldness.

He heard that the Fourth Prince was entrusted to Gu Yun by the former Emperor before his passing. He had grown up in the Marquis manor. Jiang Chong suddenly realized now that His Highness and the Marquis were not at all alike.

Jiang Chong: "... Yes. "

Chang Geng nodded slightly. They were both smart men, there was no need for further explanation.

When Jiang Chong left with his heart full of doubt and concern, Chang Geng finally softly let out a breath. His sleep was already usually not well. He was finally able to get a bit of an uncomfortable shut-eye, but after being disturbed like this, perhaps he would not be able to sleep anymore this night. He stood up to change the indoor incense of the palace to Miss Chen's tranquilizer.

Chang Geng stood silently for a moment in front of the tranquilizer emitting onto his face. The nightmare which content he could not remember caused his chest to ache as if he was being pricked by needles. In front of an outsider, he had forcefully endured and not let it show. This feeling was very similar to several rare attacks of Bone of Impurity.

Due to Gu Yun's wounds, Miss Chen had accompanied the army. Before she left, she had called him aside, told him to increase the amount of tranquilizer and to have as much peaceful rest as he could, whenever he could.

Immense joy and great tragedy recently had completely wiped off his years of accumulated peaceful foundation, it would be tremendously more difficult to suppress it in the future. Bone of Impurity forbid heavy thinking - the more one would think, the more one would be drained of spirit.

But what else could he do? Would he throw it all away and watch Gu Yun be trapped in this ruined nation?

Chapter 69: Identity

—

Chen Qing Xu was silent for a long time. She paced restlessly in the same place for two steps. Then, she sighed deeply: "Marshal... have you ever heard of the Bone of Impurity?"

—

The bandits and mobs in the Central Plains area had caused Cai Fen great distress. After all, General Cai is already of old age. Although the army in the Central Plains appeared powerful and magnificent, in fact, it was also called the 'retirement army' by others. It was not located in an area where neither villages nor shops could be seen, it's steadily in the middle. Apart from the occasional disorder, it was basically used to distribute reinforcements to the border.

At this time, most of Cai Fen's troops were divided by the north and the west. He had no Eagle Armors on his hands. Combined with his cautious nature, he did not dare to take any risks, being harassed by the mob.

Gu Yun spent three to five days figuring out the origin and development of these mobs, personally familiarizing himself with the terrain on the map, then sent someone to contact General Cai to prepare to surround them from two sides.

The rebellious bandits did not know the leader of this troops from the capital, but after several explorations, they found that the group was even more well-off than Cai Fen's. They have Heavy Armors and guns, but never fired them. They only sent out Light Cavalry, and each time they would chase after for a mile or two then retreat, confirming that this army only had appearance but no substance. As they were planning to encircle them, Cai Fen suddenly made a move, completely changing his previous style of fighting but not pursuing, pouring out the remaining troops of the Central Plains Garrison to raid and encircle the rebellious mob.

In fact, there was not much in Central Plains Garrison force. If the two sides clashed, there was no certainty who would emerge victorious, but the bandits were accustomed to the leisurely fighting style of 'you enter, I retreat'. Assuming that they were slippery loaches, they did not have the heart to use all their accumulated resources to carelessly engage in battle, hence reusing their old trick of retreating while fighting, hiding away from Cai Fen. On their way to withdraw, they ran into Gu Yun who had been waiting for a long time.

Gu Yun ordered the Heavy Armors loaded with spears to aim their muzzles directly at the bandits. The bandit leader saw that the 'young masters' army' was coming to scare them again, he immediately ordered his men to rush into the Heavy Armors' formation.

The defensive line of the Heavy Armors broke in an instant, the Light Cavalry 'struggled' to resist. The bandits discovered that there was nothing inside the muzzle, that these were technically papers. Under great joy, they became all the more fearless, directly rushing forward.

Until the bandits were all trapped inside, the 'paper' Heavy Artillery suddenly sounded. The bandits were caught off guard, men and horses fell down. Before they could retreat, they were surrounded by the Light Cavalry and the Cai army that have always been dodging them all these time coming out from both sides, capturing them inside the pot.

The bandits' formation scattered, the legendary leader 'Huo Long' was captured alive. Gu Yun's eyes ached from the unsightly and bumpy appearance of the bandit. He intended to throw the man directly to Shen Yi to play with. "Ask him where his accomplices are, who had instructed him, where his old nest is, and if there is anything for us to rob from them..."

Shen Yi choked and coughed fiercely: "Marshal, you have turned mad from poverty!"

Gu Yun waved his hand: "Beat him if he doesn't speak... use torture to extract information, I will go catch up with Old Cai."

He was about to leave when he saw a guard holding a short sword with a peculiar shape. It was a bit longer than a dagger, the tip was bent slightly inward, creating a beautiful curve. It was quite different from the short sword in Central Plains. Gu Yun felt that it appeared familiar. He reached out to receive it.

"Marshal, this was found on the bandits leader's body."

Gu Yun took the short sword and touched the blade with his fingers. He squinted and whispered: "This is from the barbarians?"

"It is the short sword of the Eighteen Tribes." Chen Qing Xu came over and said, "Marquis, have your iron plates loosened?"

"No, I am sorry for troubling Miss Chen to run around with us in the middle of the night." Gu Yun shook his head and held the handle of the blade for a moment. "Tch, with a handle this short, would it not get in the way?"

"It is not short, this is a blade for women," Chen Qing Xu took the curved short sword and measured it with her hand. "The Man of Eighteen tribes dined on wind and drank dew, fighting for food against the beasts of the grassland, thus there is often such a groove at the handle. In case of clashing with a powerful beast, it can prevented the sword from dropping off during the fight. The steel material of this short sword is of high quality, the original owner must have been one of high status. And the handle is mostly tailor-made, the hands of the person must have been very small, similar to mine, it should be a woman - Marquis sir, look here."

She flipped the handle around for Gu Yun, there was a complex pattern on the underside, like a totem entwined by numerous flowers and vines, wrapped in the middle was a flame.

Chen Qing Xu said, "I saw this pattern of flowers and vines in an abandoned ruin of the Eighteen Tribes. I heard the slaves of the Han people who were captured say that it was the symbol of Eighteen Tribes' goddess."

"I know," Gu Yun's face suddenly turned grave. "I also know who the symbol in the middle stands for."

There was no telling when Shen Yi had come closer. As he caught sight of the pattern, he let out a heavy breath: "The heart of the earth?"

Chen Qing Xu asked in confusion: "Who?"

Shen Yi: "Hu Ge Er... Xiu Niang, she... Hasn't she been dead for years? How could it be..."

Gu Yun waved at him, took the knife and turned to the place where the bandit leader Huo Long was being imprisoned. He signaled with his hand to dismiss all the guards.

He was holding the knife, neither joy nor anger could be detected on his face. The slightly curved knife was already very old, yet it was still sharp, bringing with it the feeling of inhumanity, that it would dig out a layer of flesh and blood as soon as it was stabbed into the body.

Gu Yun pinned the tip of his knife to Huo Long's chin: "I heard that you did not confess where your old nest and your rebel army are, you have also refused to say who caused you to take advantage of the situation to harass the Cai Army?"

Huo Long: "Bah, little white face!"

Gu Yun laughed as he heard this, enjoying it quite a bit - in his view, scolding men as 'little white face' was the same as calling women 'fox spirit' - it showed that the people being cursed at was very good looking.

"You can talk to your heart's content." Gu Yun said to Shen Yi. "In the face of national difficulties, this man had colluded with a foreign country, being in communication with the Man. Those barbarian bunch have not entered the gate yet you are already here licking their feet first... It is a waste of my time interrogating you, put this information on display for everyone to see tomorrow."

As Huo Long heard the first half, he was confused, he then became more and more frightened. He could see that Gu Yun was not joking. With a disdainful attitude, he rose slowly to leave. Huo Long

struggled hard: "Pouring mud on others! Dog officer! All the brothers know that I am a man who stands up to heaven and earth. You dare to slander my reputation with such nonsense..."

"Pouring mud on others?" Gu Yun shook the Eighteen Tribes' blade in front of the Huo Long: "People in Central Plains call this thing Wolf's Fang steel. The curved crescent tip is the typical design of the barbarian, isn't this yours?"

Huo Long was stunned.

"The scabbard and groove are specially made. The sheath was made from the best leather, and the totem on the handle are as lively as real, this must have been made by a renowned expert. Ordinary barbarians would not be able to have this. If the original owner was not wealthy, they must have belonged to nobility."

Gu Yun lifted his chin slightly and glanced at Huo long. "I am telling you Ugly, your brothers all know you carry this thing on your body all day, but nobody knows the origin of it, am I right? Tch, a bunch of ignorant country bumpkins..."

"Wait! Hold... Hold on!" Huo Long cried out: "That... That thing belonged to my nemesis, it is not..."

Gu Yun laughed aloud, "Is that so, sounds quite reasonable. I have seen people carry objects from their lovers. But this is the first time I had seen someone who missed their nemesis this way. What kind of hatred could be so lingering and melancholic? Come and give me some insight."

"That woman put down more than a hundred brothers of my camp with poison, stabbed them one by one, and finally set off a fire, burning the hilltop to a clean. The entire mountain, even the birds were burnt to ash. I was the only one who could escape, leaving me with all these scars.

"I did not fucking know where she came from, nor did I know that she was a barbarian. I only carried this knife to remind myself of my past humiliation!" Huo Long furiously roared: "Dog officer, you can slander me for anything, but if you dare to pour this bucket of

shit on me, even if I became a demon, I will still bite you to death!"

Shen Yi let out an unamused laughed and said: "Your teeth are still so sharp, continuing with your made up tales: a barbarian woman barging into a bandit's nest for no reason, burning the bandits on the mountain all on her own? How fresh - Marshal, do the theatre troupes invited to your manor ever had such an interesting play?"

Gu Yun sighed: "I cannot even afford any meat, all day slurping porridge, what theatre troupe ..."

Huo Long stared at them: "Marshal... Which Marshal?

Gu Yun spun the blade in his hand at a dizzying speed, giving him a malicious smile.

Huo Long instantly came to a realization, he shudder: "You...You are... Gu...Gu"

"Don't just claim people to be your relatives. Who is your aunt*?" Shen Yi interrupted him, "Tell us how you have colluded with the barbarians and harassed the people."

**The word aunt [姑 -Gū] and Gù [Gù Yún] sounded similar.*

Huo Long's face reddened: "I said it was my enemy! Goddamnit, if there was any word that was untrue, let me be struck by lightning!

"That woman went with a small caravan at the beginning, she seemed to had been separated from her family, paying someone to give her a ride. We stopped and robbed the caravan on the way. Seeing that she was quite beautiful, we also captured her to the mountain altogether. She was carrying a baby still in diaper, it doesn't look to be a full month old, and she herself was also pregnant..."

Inside, Shen Yi was terrified, but on the outside, he asked as calmly as possible: "When did it happen?"

Huo Long said: "Nineteen... twenty years ago."

Under the dim light, Gu Yun and Shen Yi exchanged a look. It

sounded similar to the story of when the barbarian goddess fled that year, then the baby should be Chang Geng, but what was the one in Xiu Niang's belly?

Shen Yi: "What happened afterwards?"

Huo Long leaned back and said in a hoarse voice: "Most of the other people who were captured in the mountains threw a tantrum. But she was different. The woman's appearance looked good, but her brain seemed to not be working quite well. She did not respond when people talked to her, did not cry out when being beaten, did not resist whatever people ordered her to do. Within only a few months, she prematurely gave birth to a baby."

Gu Yun's hand holding the knife tightened slightly...somehow, when he heard this, he suddenly felt a kind of terror. The intuition that had never been wrong for so many years seemed to be stirring the string in his heart.

"They all said that women who had just given birth are not clean. For a period, nobody would touch her nor care about her, but for fear that she would run away, we chained her feet in the room, giving her some food everyday, yet she did not die...

"After a while, one of my little brother with his brain soaked in water, missing that woman's beauty, he had sneaked away to come see her. When he came back, he had told me in horror that there was only one baby left at her side, the other one was gone."

Shen Yi almost forgot he was interrogating, he blurted out: "Which one is missing?"

"Who the hell knows, they are all half-dead babies, bare-boned, only as large as a mouse." As expected, Huo Long was immediately alert. "Why are you asking about this?"

Shen Yi paused, strongly whipped the lash in his hand at the side, he said coldly: "If you cannot answer anything then what would be the damn point of speaking of it? There is nothing strange about missing one little Man brat, I am telling you to confess everything from start to end. What are you waiting for? Beating around the bush

like this."

Huo Long was not angry, but instead, his expression turned tense: "... No, it is not surprising for the child to die, the lives of these brats are cheap, whether one lived or died is nothing much. But curiously, my brother said, he did not see where the corpse was. The woman was locked in the room, she basically could not get out. She couldn't have buried it in the ground, but she had not thrown it out, nor did she keep it in the room, the child just... just vanished in thin air.

"At that time, the few brothers guarding said they saw a light of fire in the woman's room in the middle of the night. At first, they assumed she was cooking food in secret, but later, it was said that there are many crows circling over her room during that time..."

Shen Yi felt goosebumps raise up, he unconsciously looked at Gu Yun.

The burnt corner of Huo Long's eyes twitched a few times: "This matter once made everyone in the camp felt uneasy. Some people said that this wretch was abnormal, demonic and evil, they had wanted to simply get rid of her. There were also some lechers who were reluctant to do it, both sides fighting pointlessly for a long while without result. At that time, big brother saw that she was obedient, good at working, and was also energetic in bed, he decided to keep her, even raising the half-dead brat of hers for a few years..."

"That woman, truly is a monster..." Huo Long let out a breath: "Truly, if there are no men coming to find her at night, she would use many different methods to torment the child. His cries and shouts could be heard from even the next mountain. Several times, the brothers in the camp could not bear to look anymore, telling her to restrain herself. On the surface, she obeyed, then would go back to her room and continue on."

Gu Yun stood up abruptly.

Shen Yi's heart was also startled. Gu Yun reluctantly placed the hand holding the knife behind his back, green veins popping up.

Fortunately, Huo Long did not notice, as if immersed in past memory, he muttered: "There is an old saying, even ferocious tigers do not eat their youngs. Although those of us are merciless and evil, we are not afraid of retribution, but we have never seen a woman so cruel before.

"But there was no telling what kind of brainwashing spell she had cast on my big brother. He insisted that this kind of no good woman was suitable to stay on the mountain, that she should be one of our own. He seemed to have lost his mind to beauty, even ended up given her his own life!"

Gu Yun's voice was dyed with a little dryness that was hard to detect: "How?"

"Poisoning. Barbarian women are all poisonous. She stayed in our camp, enduring for many years, not showing any trace, gradually the brothers let their guard down and easily fell into her trap. She killed everyone in the camp, even the women, slaves, hostages captured into the mountains much like her, no one was spared. Then, she finally started a fire and burned the mountain to the ground." Pain flashed on Huo Long face for a moment, he loudly cursed, letting out a long string of dirty words.

This time, no one had the mind to interrupt him anymore. Gu Yun's expression was incredibly unsightly, appearing as if he could no longer restrain himself.

"My stomach was upset that day, I did not dare to drink lots of wine and water, I could barely have enough strength to climb out of the sea of fire and regain my life. The knife... The knife was pulled from my big brother's chest. If I ever see that woman again, I will cut her to million pieces!"

Gu Yun whispered: "She brought along a young child to kill and burn the mountain together."

"She put the cub in the basket," said Huo Long. "Carrying it on her back, the cub always looked half-dead and boneless. Lying in the bamboo basket, it only stared - staring at dead bodies everywhere and did not even cry out. After so many years, if it does not die in

that wretch's hands, it must definitely be a monster itself."

Gu Yun turned away without a word.

Shen Yi rushed out after him: "Marshal, Marshal!"

"This man cannot live," Gu Yun said quickly in a low voice. "Old Cai is still here, while he still had not noticed, make this eyesore be silenced forever, remember to handle it cleanly."

As he said this, Gu Yun suddenly seemed to remembered something, his footsteps halted, his expression filled with haze: "No, I forgot there is still Jia Lai Ying Huo. That year at Yanhui Town, he and Xiu Niang had been in contact. That barbarian must know something."

Shen Yi was frightened: "Marshal..."

"He had never told me," Gu Yun's shoulders suddenly collapsed, but the steel plate on his body prevented his back from bending, his stance was indescribably stiff.

"He had never told me, not even mentioning a single word... I know that barbarian woman's head is full of thoughts about vengeance for her country, she must have not been very kind to him, but there is still a blood connection..."

Shen Yi hurriedly said, "You don't know what that insane woman Hu Ge Er did. Twenty years ago, you are still a child with knotty nose. It's alright Zi Xi, this matter had nothing to do with you!"

"That time when we picked him up in the snow, it was not because he was a young foolish child sneaking out to play," Gu Yun whispered. "He clearly could not endure the torture anymore, that is why..."

And they had been so 'kindly' to bring him back.

Shen Yi was not able to answer.

For a long time, Shen Yi whispered, "If... I am asking a hypothetical question, what if, the child left alive is not the son of the

Royal Consort..."

Shen Yi could not help recalling that scene many years ago, the young boy Chang Geng stood in front of him, calmly said that he was no prince, that the disability on his feet was caused by Xiu Niang.

Gu Yun raised his eyes: "What do you want to say?"

"It does not matter who the mother is. There's not much difference between the Eighteen Tribes' witch and the witch's sister. The problem is... whose child was Hu Ge Er carrying?" Shen Yi licked the corners of his dry lips with difficulty.

That year, the younger sister of the consort also lived in the palace, she was to be wed to the one of royal bloodline. Would former Emperor Yuan He commit such a thing as stealing something he was keeping guard of?

If the former Emperor truly was this shameless, it would be a relief to everyone, but what if...it wasn't so?

If it was not the former Emperor, there was no doubt that the most suspected person would be the one who had helped the two women escape at that time, who harbored ill intentions, but was able to enter and exit the palace, even had the ability to release the Eighteen Tribes witches, then took over the line of spy that they left in the palace many years later...

With all these conditions combined, one can easily be reminiscent of Master Liao Chi and his group of Dong Ying spies.

Shen Yi felt cold all over: "Marshal, this..."

Gu Yun looked up at him, his eyes resembling sharp blades, Shen Yi suddenly could not open his mouth.

"Digest it in your stomach." Gu Yun lowered his head and stroked the knife with both hands: "On the Northern Man side, I will clean it all up sooner or later. Don't mention this matter any more."

Shen Yi: "... Yes. "

Gu Yun's face was as heavy as an iron. His back was supported upright by the steel plate, making him appear all the more heavyhearted. He went to find Chen Qing Xu himself.

"Miss Chen, I would like to have a word with you."

Chen Qing Xu did not know what was going on, she followed him to one side.

Gu Yun said, "Miss Chen is well-versed in medicine, you have also been in the barbarian area for half a year. I have a question to ask you."

Chen Qing Xu hurriedly lifted her robe and bowed: "I dare not".

Gu Yun absentmindedly gave her a hand: "Do they have any special witchcraft there...that makes use of babies?"

Chen Qing Xu was startled.

Gu Yun immediately caught her surprised expression in the blink of an eye: "What's wrong?"

Chen Qing Xu was silent for a long time. She paced restlessly in the same place for two steps. Then, she sighed deeply: "Marshal... have you ever heard of the Bone of Impurity?"

Chapter 70: Evil God

—

This person has the ability to bring peace to the world, but his childhood had been too rough. Although he was kind in his youth, he may not be able to remain the same way in his mid-life. There was also the hidden danger of 'Bone of Impurity', I hope that all the gentlemen will be cautious.

—

Gu Yun frowned and carefully recalled for a moment: "It sounds familiar. I've heard that...it seemed to be a kind of god from the North?”

"He is the head of the four major evil gods worshipped by the Eighteen Tribes." Chen Qing Xu said: "Legend has it that he has four feet, four arms, two heads and two hearts, and he is in charge of disasters and famines. Wu Er Gu is greedy by nature. When he descended, the earth and heaven changed, all living beings will be swallowed up by him. He is the most frightening god from the Northern Man."

Gu Yun replied with an 'oh', he somewhat could not understand.

"I infiltrated deep into the grasslands for half a year, but up to now, the witchcraft of the Eighteen Tribes, I could only touch the surface. Its deep history and profundity is beyond the imagination of foreigners such as those of us from far away.

“There are many witchcraft and poisons related to their strange legends of evil gods, the most vicious one is the ‘Bone of Impurity’ — Wu Er Gu". Chen Qing Xu paused slightly. "'Four feet, four arms, two heads and two hearts', in a literal sense, what does the Marquis think this looks like?”

Gu Yun reply with hesitance: "It sounds like two people merging together."

Chen Qing Xu: "Yes, the evil god Wu Er Gu devoured his brother as soon as he was born and gained twice the amount of divine power ever since. There is an ancient witchcraft in the Eighteen Tribes which combines two brothers connected by blood into one soon after they were born, and produces a...monster that can acquire the power of the evil god, also known as ‘Bone of Impurity’.”

Gu Yun listened, he was silent for a moment, gently pressing under his ribs. Although there was the steel plate support, but somehow, he could still felt needle-like pain under it.

Chen Qing Xu hurriedly said, "Marquis, your wound..."

"It is all right," Gu Yun waved his hand, licked his lips slightly, slowed down his tone and asked, "Miss Chen, I don't quite understand what it means to ‘merge two people into one’?”

Chen Qing Xu hesitated a little.

"Don't worry," Gu Yun said. “You can say it."

"I have only heard this from tales, I'm afraid it might not be accurate," Chen Qing Xu murmured. "It is to put a pair of babies under the age of one in a sealed place, not giving them any light, water, nor food.... one of the two will die from suffocation first. The dead baby will then be taken out and be refined by a secret method.”

Gu Yun thought for an instant that his medicinal effect had worn off, that his ears were deceiving him. He asked again with difficulty: "...What?"

"Refining." Chen Qing Xu emphasized on the word: "Then combined with the secret medicine of the barbarian witch as an activator, feeding to its surviving brother bit by bit...”

Gu Yun lost his voice: "Could that child still live at this point?"

"Marshal had underestimated the Eighteen Tribes’ thousand years of witchcraft," Chen Qing Xu said. "In the lost witchcraft, there are even vivid and detailed records of turning dead people into an animated corpse, let alone using living beings for refinement.

“They think if a person... or perhaps a ‘Bone of Impurity’, was refined in this way, from childhood, he would have infinite strength or extraordinary wisdom far different from ordinary people, because ‘he’ is actually two people, with ‘four feet and two heads’, he can invite the power of evil gods.”

Gu Yun hesitated and said, "Forgive me for being ignorant of this...matter. Miss Chen, I think this all sounds like a ridiculous story passed among those uncivilized fools.”

Chen Qing Xu said: "With our inherent knowledge and understanding, the Marquis can regard Bone of Impurity as a kind of poison that destroys one's mental state. Some mad men are indeed more powerful than ordinary people and often think differently from ordinary people. When they have not yet lost all their sense completely, it is not strange for them to have unusual intelligence.”

Gu Yun: "...There are still things we can't understand with our innate knowledge."

Chen Qing Xu said, "Marshal, to tell you the truth, I sneaked into Eighteen Tribes to research their witchcraft, not only for your ears and eyes, but also for tracing back the origin of Bone of Impurity.

“But there are very few records about it from the Man people. There is only one tale about an ancient barbarian general, whose name is ‘Wu Er Gu’. This man is cruel and bloodthirsty, but he had won hundreds of battle, singlehandedly creating the foundation of the united Eighteen Tribes we see now. He lived until 32 years old, had never married in his life, the reason was because he was neither dead nor alive, neither man nor woman.”

Gu Yun felt goosebumps raise up.

Chen Qingxu: "I had checked the record of birth, death, and origin of this person and learned that his mother had given birth to twins of one boy and one girl, but afterwards, there was no record of the female baby, nor was there any record that she was dead... there are only two explanations: one is that after their family was defeated, the girl was lost, the other was…”

The pair of boy and girl twin were made into Bone of Impurity, the dead and the living were merged into one, male and female lived together in the same body. This was ‘neither dead nor alive, neither man nor woman’.

Gu Yun pressed his hand under his ribs tightly, Chen Qing Xu asked nervously, "Marquis, did the steel plate come loose?"

Gu Yun bent down and took a breath after a while. He whispered: "Why would anyone do such a thing?"

Chen Qing Xu supported him to one side and helped him sit down: "Usually when the country was broken and the nation could no longer be preserved that did this kind of cruel method would be used, offering blood as a sacrifice to the evil gods in exchange for vengeance. When all the people named ‘Wu Er Gu’ were born, they would all lead to blood-soaked turbulence."

Gu Yun: "You have just said that it was like a kind of poison that harm the people's mind. Could you elaborate more on this?”

Chen Qing Xu said: “Wu Er Gu will turn insane. At first, there will be entangling nightmares. Over time, they will become sensitive and suspicious. If they do not restrain, it will gradually produce hallucinations. Finally..."

"That is why...," As Gu Yun said these words, his voice seemed to crack. He had to forcefully clear his throat to be able to continue this sentence. "That is why you prescribed him with tranquilizer…”

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

Of course, she knew who Gu Yun was speaking of. She could not say anything, only admitting to it in silence.

Gu Yun closed his eyes slightly — he recalled that Chang Geng had mentioned to him carelessly more than once, such words as ‘too much fire will cause restless sleep’ and so on, yet he had never thought about it carefully, only assuming that as this child followed someone from the Chen family to study medicine for so long, it had turned him delirious, that he had made himself into an elderly man

all day talking about health care. But as it turned out...he had so much pain inside.

Gu Yun: "What stage is Chang Geng at?"

Chen Qing Xu remained silent for a moment.

Gu Yun: "You can tell me, I can accept whatever, as long as I am still alive for one more day, whether he is insane or brainless, I will take care of him until the end."

Chen Qing Xu said, "His Highness... His Highness has incredible will, his heart is peaceful. For many years, the Bone of Impurity on his body has never acted up. He himself was also aware of this, thus he has restrained himself much more than ordinary people. Only that a while ago, um... I have suppressed it using needles. The Marquis needn't worry about it."

Although she spoke in a vague manner, Gu Yun was able to understand — it had always been peaceful, never acting up, except for the period awhile ago.

"Because of me." He thought in a blank state, standing up abruptly almost like a corpse coming to life. He stumbled for a moment, his expression appeared as if he had just been stabbed.

He avoided Chen Qing Xu's helping hand, the rigid supporting steel plate making him appear like an iron puppet that had ran out of *Ziliujin*.

Chen Qing Xu stopped in place for a moment. Her plain white face was heavy with emotions. She could not help looking back in the direction of the capital city. The wooden bird released in the past few days should have arrived in the capital by now, just...was the decision she wrote in the letter truly the correct one?

The sky in the capital was gloomy. When the wooden bird flew past, its small figure was completely absorbed in the overwhelming dark clouds, becoming almost invisible.

Zhang Feng Han got out of a carriage and placed his hands together to thank the person inside: "I apologize for troubling Your

Highness in taking your time to send this old man here."

Chang Geng lifted the curtain and smile, "I've been living in the Grand Council for days. I should go back to Marquis's Manor to get new clothes and take a bath, it is also on the same road. Master Feng Han need not be overly courteous — but did Ling Shu Institute not provide you with a carriage?"

Zhang Feng Han did not pay it any mind: "They are all used for the underlings to run errands, I am not going out of the capital, these old bones are all soft, I should move about a bit more. Now there are wars everywhere, the court have many places to distribute money to. Let's save as much as we can. Even if we could not prevent the storm, but can't we do a little bit of our best ability?"

Chang Geng laughed and said, "That is the truth. This later generation had learnt something."

Zhang Feng Han hurriedly said, "I dare not." then took his leave, but Chang Geng stopped him: "Master Feng Han, please wait."

He then took out the proud and unashamed request for the Emperor to lift the ban on the common folks' *Ziliujin* trade, handing it to him with both hands and said: "Master Feng Han please forgive me, I had stopped this request without authorization and did not send it forward — there is no outsider here, I would like to say a word of criticism, please don't be angry. The commoners' *Ziliujin* trade has always been a sensitive point of the Emperor. Since the beginning of Emperor Wu's reign, there has never been any lenience. For the Emperor, *Ziliujin* is the same as the jade seals commanding the kingdom. Placing yourself in his position, if you were the Emperor, could you allow the people to carve the jade seal out of radish and sell them for fun?"

Zhang Feng Han knew that it would be useless to send out this request. He would either had it returned to him by the Military Office, or he would end up provoking Emperor Long An to lose his temper. However, he carried himself with the character of a scholar. He always felt 'whether you like to hear it or not, I will still say what should be said'. Who would have thought that His Highness Yan Wang would come explaining to him personally, even with so much

sincerity?

Zhang Feng Han blushed and sighed, "Your Highness...oh, your Highness is right, I have momentarily gone confused from old age, I had caused more trouble for your Highness."

"I know your heart that goes out to the country and the people. As the backbone of the Ling Shu Institute, these recent years, Great Liang is unstable, all armors and equipments are depending on your hands for preparing," Chang Geng waved. "We could not even protect you enough, what trouble?"

Zhang Feng Han was at a loss, his demeanor was genuine, his tone did not cause people to feel irritate. He did not know how to respond and could only repeat: “How embarrassing”.

"Since my childhood brother Ge Chen entered Ling Shu Institute, he has been murmuring in my ear all day about what Master Feng Han is like," Chang Geng teased. "He wished nothing more than to copy even your habit of drinking *houkui* tea and eating pickled radish, I think the only thing missing was for him to buy a white hair wig to wear.”

Zhang Feng Han's old face was so red this time that he wished he could call his new apprentice Ge Chen over to give him a slap for pouring every trivial matters into *Yan Wang*’s ears.

"Ge Chen and I grew up together in Yanhui town. When we were young, we were caught in the barbarian invasion, he had no one left in his family and had been following me for so many years..."

Chang Geng paused, looking at Zhang Feng Han with some embarrassment. "I will not beat around the bush anymore. Let's be frank. There is an presumptuous request that Ge Chen wants me to bring to you. He had always adored your character greatly, he wished to recognize you... well, as an elder. He does not ask for anything more, just wanted to be able to serve you in the future, it would fulfill his wish, what do you think?”

Zhang Feng Han was short of breath for a moment.

After returning with Shen Yi, Ge Chen had stayed in the capital and entered Ling Shu Institute. He was diligent, smart, and talented. Having special affinity with Zhang Feng Han, he was accepted as a close disciple by the old man in just a few days.

But a disciple was different from an adopted son. In his lifetime, he had no power and no influence, he could only caused people to be irritated, what benefits could he bring to the other? How could he be able to protect anyone? Even though he was old and desolate, with no children or grandchildren, except some old dogs in his family, who would ever care for him?

Chang Geng stole a glance at his face and said: "Tch, I have quickly told him that Master Feng Han favored peace and quiet and would not like the noisy type such as himself. You need not feel perplexed, I will scold him in your stead later. You can rest assured, he had been carefree since childhood, he would not take this to heart."

Zhang Feng Han hurriedly said: "Your Highness, slow down! Your Highness! I... This... I..."

The elderly man panicked, his tongue was in a knot, his forehead was full of sweat. Chang Geng was silent, only giving him a leisurely smile. His smile did not have a single hint of ill intent, it was clear and bright like a young man, dyed with the right amount of mischievousness.

Zhang Feng Han seldom saw him not displaying his experienced and adept image. He came back to his senses, laughing helplessly and said: "Your Highness is really..."

"Then I will tell him, my home is around the next right turn. Master Feng Han, please help yourself," Chang Geng said gently. "I will tell Xiao Ge to find a good day to bow to you. That's right, it looks like it is going to rain. You can take an umbrella from me just in case."

Zhang Feng Han, an old stubborn thorn that busted Li Feng's head, said goodbye to him with a smile, watching kindly at the carriage of Yan Wang as it went away.

As soon as Chang Geng left, it had turned out to be as he said, a light rain began to trickle down.

Master Feng Han raised the umbrella that Chang Geng had left him. For the past six months, even with the army shortage and continued chaos, though it was not peaceful, as long as he looked at these young people, he felt that the pillar of Great Liang had not collapsed, there were still people supporting it.

There were many intelligent and talented people in the world. However, if a person was too smart, they would often lose a few parts of enthusiasm, they would be more inclined to keep to themselves. Only when a truly wise and brave person took the lead in standing up and shouldering this pillar could they bring them together as a group.

The person at the front were doomed to work hard but would not necessarily have a good end. They might have to endure for naught. But in this vast sand, if there did not exist these few large stones, wouldn't everything already be washed down through thousands of generations?

When Master Feng Han turned around and saw a snow-white monk's robe flashing across the corner of the lane, he took back the smile from his face and walked quickly towards it.

The restaurant in the small alley was not as elegant and dignified as the old Qi Yuan Tower, but more like a casual small tea shop. It was not at all unnatural for someone like Master Feng Han to come in. He folded his umbrella, shaking the rain droplets off the top. Hearing a few taps on the wooden staircase, he looked up to see Master Liao Ran taking off his wet hat, standing on the second floor and gave him a slight nod in greetings. He understood and moved up.

One after the other, they went to the innermost compartment where there was already a middle-aged man in waiting. The man was about forty or fifty years old, his appearance was average, his clothings were not quite eye-catching. But at first glance, he was very friendly, the corners of his eyes were shaped in a soft round curve. However, if there was any one from the Ministry of Housing here, they would be startled — this man was Du Wan Quan, the richest man in Jiangnan.

Du Wan Quan prospered in Jiangnan. He once created a merchant team to travel across the Western Ocean by himself. It was the only giant ship to ever go to the Western countries after Emperor Wu opened the sea route. Going through many dangers, making a lot of profits, he was nicknamed the 'God of Wealth' after his return.

Later, he moved his home to the northwest and was elected as the president of the Central Plains' trading group at the Silk Road area.

As early as during the days when the Marquis of Order was put under house arrest for an unknown reason, this keen and sensitive businessman had taken the lead in calling the members of the trading group to evacuate in batches. As a result, the turbulence in the Western Regions did not affect too many innocent people. It could be said that the windmill of this God of Wealth changed its direction very timely.

No one knew how much money Du Wan Quan had, people all said that he was rich enough to be on an equal to a country. Of course, in the light of the dire situation of Great Liang, it was no great thing to be an equal to a country.

Such a god of wealth like himself, now with a monk from Hu Guo Temple and an old stubborn man of the Ling Shu Institute — all gathered in a rather shabby small tavern.

Seeing Zhang Feng Han, Du Wan Quan stood up politely and offered the first seat to him. He put his hands together and said: "Please sit down. I have not seen my old brother for more than ten years, it seems that you haven't changed at all, even more elegant than you were then."

Zhang Feng Han refused while replying: "What are you saying? I have only gotten older."

Du Wan Quan honestly said: "Before this Du came to the capital, I was dissuaded by my wife and children. They were afraid that the situation in the capital would be unstable, these old bones of mine will end up perishing here. But isn't master Feng Han even older than myself? In the face of the enemy, your expression did not change

even without a single weapon. I am only a small businessman, I could not be compared to you, the unparalleled warrior. But if I dare not even travel here to see you, then what type of man would I be?”

Du 'God of Wealth' had been doing business for a long time, peace and wealth had soaked into his bones. Although his speech differed from His Highness *Yan Wang*, both of them belonged to the kind who could make people blush and feel good about themselves at the same time. Zhang Feng Han realized that they would not necessarily be able to talk business if he continued to be overly courteous with him, thus he had to take the seat in the first position.

Master Liao Ran put his hands together and gestured in sign language: "Mister Du's family has a large business, there are numerous of myriad affairs to attend to, and Master Feng Han will have to rush back to Ling Shu Institute in a few minutes. Let's get directly into the topic. This later generation shall take the lead.”

With that, he took out the beads in his arms and gently pulled them. One of the bead fell off. He then broke the biggest beads apart and took out an old hollow wood with a simple shell having numerous delicate gears inside, quietly displaying it.

Master Feng Han and Du Wan Quan looked at each other, no longer being courteous. They both took out a piece of hollow wood from their arms. Three hollow wood blocks were placed near one another, they were instantly attracted to each other and slid on the table. The gears inside were interlocked, becoming seamless in an instant, forming the top half of a wooden emblem with the word ‘Lin’ on it.

"The last time this emblem was put together, it was more than two hundred years ago," Du Wan Quan sighed: "The last time our ancestors entrusted this thing to the Tai Zu Emperor, they did not choose the wrong person, exchanging for two hundred years of peace and prosperity. It is now handed down to our generation, I hope this time we can still choose the right one... today, as Master Liao Ran had summoned Lin Yuan, there must be someone to choose.”

Liao Ran then gestured: "Old Zhong and Chen family's representative are both at the front line and could not come. Old

Zhong had sent over his opinions and the wooden piece he kept with him a few days ago. There is chaos at Miss Chen's place, it was also farther away, I still have yet to see hers, but my guess is that it will arrive in more or less another day."

Du Wan Quan looked at the Lin Yuan wooden emblem on the table and sat upright, solemnly saying: "Master, please speak."

"Amitabha," with his hands folded and his head hung down, he continue: "At the beginning of the war, a man had use wooden birds in Lin Yuan Pavilion to send messages, preserving a way out for the capital under siege. Taking on the mission in the midst of danger to kill the spy, personally defending the city, and resisting the decree of passing to him the imperial throne —"

When Zhang Feng Han heard this, he immediately echoed the sentiment: "I agree with the man that Master spoke of, I had interacted with His Highness *Yan Wang* the most in the court. Although he is young, he has both abilities and virtue. I would like to entrust my wooden emblem to him.

"I am ashamed to say that I have leisurely sat and ate salary for many years. I could not be of any use in face of a critical situation. When I heard the frontline battle reports, I was in dismay and could not think that it was possible for the Westerner to besiege the capital city, nor did I think of using wooden birds to send messages...what do you say, Mister Du?"

The two men on the table looked at Du Wan Quan at the same time. Du Wan Quan thought about it for a moment, he then responded: "His Royal Highness is a person of nobility, I never had contact with him. But I heard that His Royal Highness was once a student of Old Zhong and even had friendship with the Chen family. They must know more about him. Why don't we wait for them?"

Liao Ran suddenly brought out a wooden bird. There was very thin seal on its abdomen that was still intact.

"This is Old Zhong's," signed Liao Ran. "This monk hasn't opened it yet, please."

Du Wan Quan rubbed his hands and said with a hint of embarrassment: "This Du will go ahead."

When he finished, he carefully peeled the seal, opening up the belly of the bird and took out the fourth wooden emblem from it.

With this piece, the word 'Yuan' was mostly spelled out, only one corner was left. Under the wooden plate, there was a seagrain paper sent from Zhong Chan.

Zhang Feng Han said: "Old Zhong had taught His Royal Highness Yan Wang how to deploy troops, how to ride, and how to shoot. With such great sentiment, how could he..."

His voice suddenly stopped, Du Wan Quan laid the seagrain paper of General Zhong Chan on the table. It read: *This person has the ability to bring peace to the world, but his childhood had been too rough. Although he was kind in his youth, he may not be able to remain the same way in his mid-life. There was also the hidden danger of 'Bone of Impurity', I hope that all the gentlemen will be cautious.*

Chapter 71: Authority

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We can't work for them in vain. When that time comes, I should request the Emperor to grant me a hilltop with the best scenery where I can plant a peach blossom forest on the hill, enjoy flowers in spring, eat peaches in summer. There must be a hot springs under the hill.

—

Zhang Feng Han, whose praises seemed to have failed him, stared at the note for a long time, his face changing, "What does this mean? What... what is the hidden danger of the Bone of Impurity?"

Liao Ran frowned as if not knowing where to start. After a long moment, he hesitantly said: "It is a poison from the North. His Highness *Yan Wang* strayed to Yanhui town in his childhood and was harmed by the Northern Witch. Up until now, the Chen family is still trying to find a cure to thoroughly treat it..."

Zhang Feng Han could not believe it: "Is there such a thing? Are all the hospitals dead? This... "

"Don't be impatient," Du Wan Quan interrupted him. "In the past few years, because of the Silk Road, I have often been around the northwest area and heard about the witchcraft of barbarians. I heard that this Bone of Impurity seems to be harmful to the human mind. I think General Zhong is concerned about this as well, he's only worried that His Highness might have to think too much."

"In the face of national disaster, the Marquis of Order is still going to the northwest despite his injuries, how could *Yan Wang* be the type that would try to save himself, Master Du's words could not help but make people feel disheartened," Zhang Feng Han said solemnly. "Moreover, Master Liao Ran said that he was poisoned

since he was a child. But even now I can't see any abnormality in him and it may not have much influence in the future. If General Zhong cannot believe in *Yan Wang*, can he still find someone else to take over the Lin Yuan emblem?"

Since the siege of the capital city, Zhang Feng Han had fully become a loyal supporter of *Yan Wang*. The umbrella on his hands was just taken from the other's. With the mentions of *Yan Wang*, he had immediately become hotheaded, wishing that he could say aloud '*my Royal Highness is the best in the world*'.

After finishing these words, the old Ling Shu Master still had not relieved of his anger, he continued: "At this time, unlike two hundred years ago, when the imperial court levied aggressively and lost the hearts of the people, only then did the people on four sides rise up. But now it is a foreign enemy who entered the country, the Emperor... although some measures and decrees of the Emperor are too fierce, he is still a hard working man who loved the people, he could not be blamed.

"In this troubled world, if the Lin Yuan emblem falls into the hands of someone else, who can guarantee that he will not grow ill intent? His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* was originally of high nobility. He could have succeeded the throne in this crisis and fled to the east of the capital, yet he did not go to Luoyang, but he was on the city tower instead. If such a person is not worth entrusting the Lin Yuan wooden emblem to, who else could be?"

Du Wan Quan was long used to being keen and flexible, he did not argue with him. He only laughed and said, "I truly believe that His Highness *Yan Wang*'s personality and talent are beyond reproach, but matters concerning the body, we outsiders are not very well-versed, are we? Let's all listen to Miss Chen. First, order some wine and food, we will then make a decision after Miss Chen's letter arrives. alright?"

Zhang Feng Han's face eased up a bit, he shook his head and mocked himself: "Already so old but still so hot headed, Master Du please do not take it to heart."

Before he finished, the three of them heard a flutter of wings

coming from the window at the same time.

Du Wan Quan laughed and said: "Speak of the devil."

Du Wan Quan pushed open the window, a lively little wooden bird came in and gently pecked two times on the table, then laid down motionlessly. This wooden bird was even more special than General Zhong's. The latter was sent over by trusted people, while Chen Qing Xu's bird flew from where she was accompanying the army to the northwest.

The wooden bird's abdomen was sealed by special means, unlike General Zhong's seal that was only for show, but by a series of closely seamed secret locks with 27 holes which needed to be penetrated in the right sequence with fine needle. Otherwise, it will ignite the *Ziliujin* left in the wooden bird's abdomen, and those who do not know the key to unlock it would not be able to obtain anything.

This special wooden bird's craftsmanship was extremely complex, Lin Yuan Pavilion only had a few, even Chang Geng did not know of them - when Westerners besieged the city, he was once concerned about the safety of wooden bird communication.

Du Wan Quan took out a silver needle and two other's eyes fell on his hand at the same time. For a moment, Zhang Feng Han suddenly felt an unspeakable tension.

"Wait a minute." Just before Du Wan Quan opened the wooden bird seal and took out the letter, Zhang Feng Han suddenly stopped him.

Du Wan Quan and Liao Ran looked up at him in unison.

Although they all belonged to Lin Yuan Pavilion, but Zhang Feng Han who was stuck in the Ling Shu Institute all the year round and Chen Qing Xu who was a younger generation were not at all close, they have never seen each other, let alone understood one another. But somehow, his heart raised a kind of feeling that the result might not be what he hoped for.

Zhang Feng Han, with his face tightened, said slowly, "At

present, the coast of the East Sea is in the hands of foreigners, General Zhong himself is guarding the front line, but he is only guarding it. He dares not rush into action. With his troops and combat readiness, it is not enough to cross the river at all. I hear that the foreigners are brutal and cruel, they have burned Jiangnan Academy in a rage - that is nothing, books can be reprinted if lost, but if the people are gone, there is no way to save them."

When the old Ling Shu Master said this, his voice trembled for a moment: "This land where 'sweet-scented osmanthus blossoms in the mid-autumn, fragrant lotus are in full bloom in ten miles'* has now become a scorched earth, our treasury is empty, *Ziliujin* is running out... there is leakage on all sides, if Lin Yuan Pavilion stands by idly, we might as well separate, go home to take care of your children, what is the point in entering the Pavilion?

**quoting Liu Yong, a Song dynasty poet*

"Since we can't be silent and the wooden emblem must reappear, although we are only pawns, we do not want to entrust it to the wrong person either. In today's world, the court has *Yan Wang*, the frontier has Marshal Gu. Marshal Gu... I say, although he had contact with Lin Yuan Pavilion for a long time, he had never expressed any intention of getting closer. The man holding the Black Iron Camp did not even want to look at or have time to deal with our disorderly resources. If you gentlemen use... this kind of unnecessary and uncertain reason to overlook His Royal Highness, what are we going to do next?"

He spoke sincerely, trying his best to pull Du Wan Quan to their side, even Liao Ran was slightly touched.

But Du 'God of Wealth' was an experienced person, he was not so easy to get hot-headed. After listening, on the surface, he appeared enthusiastic, but his mouth was still avoiding the subject: "In fact, His Highness Yan Wang have good friendship with Lin Yuan Pavilion while growing up, he could even be considered to be a member already. When the communication network of the capital was besieged, didn't His Highness start building his own using Lin Yuan Pavilion? In the face of national calamity, wherever we can be of use, there would be no objection to it. It is not quite a necessity to

perform the ritual of entrusting the wooden emblem, is it?"

"No, Master Du is mistaken," Liao Ran shook his head. "Without this emblem, Lin Yuan Pavilion would only offer some bits of aid in case of an accident. Only with this emblem could it make the Pavilion's members use all their resources and strength to support. It is not the same.

"Lin Yuan Pavilion has been silent for two hundred years, it all depended on this wooden emblem for assembling and communicating. In troubled times, everyone would want to keep to themselves. Without the Lin Yuan emblem, even for those of us, the manpower we can use would only be limited to only a few underlings delivering news. I am afraid it is not even as useful as some relatively large groups from the pugilist world."

At Liao Ran's words, Du Wan Quan's face changed slightly.

The God of wealth was different from Zhang Feng Han who was so poor as to be accompanied by a dog. He was a real man with a big family business. The barefooted had no burden, they only had themselves to feed, but those wearing shoes were different.

If there was anyone here who did not want Lin Yuan Wooden emblem to reappear in the world, it was undoubtedly Du Wan Quan.

Surely, Liao Ran wanted saved face for him, so far, there was no direct confrontation - Lin Yuan emblem could mobilize the most mysterious 'Dao Fa Hall' in Lin Yuan Pavilion. Anyone in the Pavilion who refused to obey the command of the emblem and fled, Dao Fa Hall would chase that person to the ends of the earth. That was to say, without the wooden emblem, Du 'God of Wealth' might only need to pay a little pocket money, but with this emblem, even if it ruined his family business, he must accept it.

Liao Ran put his beads together again one by one. "Master Du, please bring out the wooden piece of Chen's family."

Du Wan Quan was silent for a while. He opened the wooden bird's belly. The last wooden piece fell down. Once it dropped on the table, it automatically gathered with other wooden pieces to

complete the word 'Yuan'.

Chen Qing Xu's seagrain paper rolled out. He saw that the note was very short: *"Chen family will give it our all."*

Zhang Feng Han was a little overwhelmed for a moment: "Was that it?"

However, Liao Ran smiled helplessly. Chen Qing Xu was the quiet type, it was slightly better when communicating orally. When using the paper and pen, she had no patience to write a long story. If it could be done, then it could be done. Large matters coming to her hands would be no more than one sentence.

"Now that Miss Chen has said this, the chronic poisoning in His Highness body should not be a problem," Liao Ran then turned to Du Wan Quan: "What does Master Du say?"

The Lin Yuan emblem was divided into five pieces. No one was qualified to veto it alone. At this time, it was three-against-one. Du Wan Quan knew that no matter if he agreed or disagreed with it, the outcome was already established.

Du 'God of Wealth' smiled bitterly and said, "Master, you are being too overly courteous. I heard that His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* is carrying out the Feng Huo ticket recently. If this Du can be of any use, please just say so."

Zhang Feng Han euphemistically advised, "Master Du, there is no good egg under the overturned nest. When the world is in turmoil, human in chaos is not as good as dogs in peace time. Countless wealth is no different from quicksand and flowing water. Isn't this the truth?"

Du Wan Quan, who was forcibly tied onto this ship by a group of poor demons, was still very distressed. He perfunctorily put his hands together and said: "Yes, Master Feng Han had good faith."

The three men each with their own thoughts, had a quick simple meal then scattered before even touching the drinks.

Just when they made this decision, Chang Geng returned to the Marquis's Manor.

Ge Chen was waiting for him in his study. Chang Geng instructed the others not to disturb them. He stepped in quietly and closed to the door.

The manor was empty with very few people. The old servants were either deaf or moved slowly. There was no telling whether they were serving at their master's house or retiring at their master's house, often not coming when they were called. Sometimes even serving tea or pouring water must be done by one's self. But there were also convenient points, for example, one did not have to always be on guard against eavesdropping.

Ge Chen stood up at the sight of Chang Geng, his natural baby's face was slightly nervous.

Chang Geng, however, was as calm and natural as ever, waving at him: "Have you intercepted it?"

Ge Chen responded and drew a piece of seagrain paper from his arm.

"As you said, by using the excuse of repairing the anti air net, I secretly intercepted the wooden bird. The note inside was changed and the seals were guaranteed to be seamless," Ge Chen said, licking his lips. "When Xiao Cao went to the north at the end of the year to find Miss Chen, he saw her collect and release the wooden bird herself. He then stole it and replicated the seals with a mold, there should be no problem - Big brother, why must we intercept Miss Chen's wooden bird? What is the meaning of her note?"

Chang Geng did not reply for a moment and unfolded the crumpled note.

The handwriting on it was the same as the one Liao Ran and the others received, but the content was completely different.

This note read: *"This Chen is inexperienced, after searching for many years, I could not find a cure for the Bone of Impurity, I had failed the expectation. The matter concerning the Lin Yuan wooden emblem, I hope the gentlemen will be cautious."*

After Chang Geng saw it, he was not at all surprised, thinking: "*Sure enough*."

According to his understanding of Lin Yuan Pavilion after many years, for the leaders, if it was not three people, then it would be five people, although there was a higher percentage for it being five. There were many unique and exquisite steel armors in Lin Yuan Pavilion. Therefore, there must be someone from the Ling Shu Institute.

The Chen family who treated Gu Yun's ears at that time was also under the name of Lin Yuan Pavilion. Gu Yun could not trust them unconditionally, there must be an old member of the previous Marquis faction recommending them, thus there must be a representative for the army.

Liao Ran had been acting as an informant for all four sides. He could be one of them, representing the Hu Guo Temple. Then one of the other two are probably in control of 'wealth', the other was the Chen family in Taiyuan.

Among these five people, he only had a bigger grasp on Ling Shu Institute and Liao Ran, while the other three parties were still uncertain.

In addition to Chang Geng himself, only Miss Chen knew the most terrifying part of Bone of Impurity. She had always been the type who assessed the situation rather than the person, she would not support him because of her personal feelings. But the people who controlled 'wealth' tend to be burdened by their family business. Under this circumstances, they were more likely to take a step back.

Representing the military... if Chang Geng's guess was correct

and it truly was General Zhong, Zhong Chan would not necessarily vouch for him. The latter two had their own ways, it was very difficult for him to make contact. Only Chen Qing Xu who accompanied the army in the northwest, when the moment came, would definitely use a wooden bird to send her message which would provide him with an opportunity.

Chang Geng put the seagrain paper in the basin and burned it. The gloomy light illuminated his young and handsome face, making him look a little unreal.

"Big brother..." Ge Chen hesitantly called out to him. Although this little round face was loyal to his Yan Wang, but he was not foolish. He could probably guess that Chen Qing Xu's encrypted wooden bird might be related to Lin Yuan Pavilion's final decision. Although he had followed Chang Geng's instruction to switch the papers, he was always doubtful - Chang Geng had always been straightforward and open-minded, he had never done such a shady and disgraceful thing. But he used such means this time for Lin Yuan Pavilion... was it for power?

"It is not that I must obtain Lin Yuan Pavilion at all cost." Chang Geng seemed to know what he was thinking, casually explaining to Ge Chen, "But my time in the court was too short. Although I had the support of the Emperor temporarily, plus Master Jiang and other new followers, but after all, this foundation was still too shallow. There are many things that could not be carried out. Others can wait, but *Ziliujin* and money for the front line can not afford to wait. At this time, I can only retreat to seek the power of Lin Yuan Pavilion. If there is time, all problems can be solved fairly and slowly. My only fear is that the foreigners will not give us this time."

Ge Chen straightened his back as he heard these words, all his doubts disappeared. Instead, he felt somewhat embarrassed: "Both Xiao Cao and I understood this, um... Big brother, you must also pay more attention to taking care of yourself. Otherwise wait until the Marquis returns to the court, if you would fall ill again, then wouldn't he come to pick a fight with me?"

After that, he seemed to imagine the specific process of the Marquis coming to trouble him, ending up frightening himself.

Chang Geng's face softened a little. "I will only manage until this dangerous situation passes, when the world is at peace. Who is willing to do such a tiring job with no benefit? We can't work for them in vain. When that time comes, I should request the Emperor to grant me a hilltop with the best scenery where I can plant a peach blossom forest on the hill, enjoy flowers in spring, eat peaches in summer. There must be a hot springs under the hill. I plan to raise some chickens and ducks, if they lay eggs then I'll throw them directly into the hot spring to boil..."

Ge Chen's stomach grumbled, Chang Geng was stunned, then the two laughed at the same time. Chang Geng jumped up. "It is already too late. Don't disturb Uncle Wang, let us brothers make some dumplings for ourselves to eat."

Ge Chen was rather embarrassed and said, "No, it can't be, brother, how can His Highness personally roll the skin and make the stuffing...this is really.."

Chang Geng looked at him and said: "Do you want to eat or not?"

Ge Chen firmly responded: "Eat!"

Thus they blindly sneaked into the kitchen of the manor under the dim lights and dismissed the sleepy old cook back to sleep. They thrashed around for a moment, at the sound of the night patrol, one held the lid, and the other was holding the spoon. The two then ate about sixty dumplings right in the kitchen. Ge Chen cried out from the hot dumplings. It seemed as if they had returned to their childhood days in the countryside.

The good moments only stayed in the middle of the deep night. At day time, danger still lingered in every step.

A month later, the Feng Huo ticket was still not implemented.

Just as Emperor Li Feng had run out of patience by the noisy commotion, a quiet cleansing gradually began.

First of all, the inspector's office immediately sent forth three reports accusing *Yan Wang* of abusing his authority, that the Grand Council secretly withheld the papers of the court's officers, leading to the complaints of the people not reaching the ears of the ruler, that the so-called Feng Huo ticket was a hoax, that it threw on the ground the face of the court and trampled on it, causing disaster to the country and the people.

Yan Wang ordered people to bring all written record about all reports that the Grand Council had sent out and returned from the establishment of the office until now. When and why were they returned were all written down and explained in details, even in the summarized report sent to the Xinuan Pavilion. There was no discrepancy between them. The court was momentarily speechless.

Yan Wang then asked Emperor Long An to retract all his authority, for him to step down from his post on the grounds of 'ignorance of knowledge and difficulty to please the public'. As usual, Li Feng did not approve. His Royal Highness, who had just reached the age of twenty, who was still young and vigorous, turned his head and claimed that he was sick, running back to the Marquis's Manor and closed the door.

Even the court filled with old fox spirits who were experienced in adapting have never seen anyone who displayed such a blatant temper.

Li Feng did not know whether to laugh or cry for a moment. However, without even waiting for him to come out of the palace to coax his younger brother, something instantly happened in the court as soon as *Yan Wang* left.

Firstly, the Grand Council with its head lost became a chaotic mess. The papers presented to Li Feng's desk every day resembled snowfall. From everywhere were requests for money, for *Ziliujin*, causing him to be at a loss.

Then the two ministers of Housing and War almost started

getting into a physical fight on the court. Li Feng ordered an investigation in anger and found that even as it had already come to this, some people were still cutting off military fund. A major case was discovered that shocked the court and the countryside. From the second rank top officials to the meager seventh ranks, a large number of people were implicated. Even the talkative bunch of the inspector's office fell by a half.

In September, an autumn rain washed the desolated capital. Jiang Chong personally went to the Marquis's Manor with a decree to invite *Yan Wang* back to the court. At this point, it seemed that the people with their own intention had started to understand the situation. *Yan Wang* raised the Feng Huo ticket matter again and this time, it was pushed forward with little resistance.

At first, some people were worried that the first batch of Feng Huo tickets could not be sold. But just after the first batch of Feng Huo tickets came out, Du Wan Quan, the richest man in Jiangnan, contacted a group of folk charitable businessmen to provide support. Within three days, the first batch of Feng Huo tickets were all cleaned out.

Real gold and silver poured into the treasury. At this point, no one could talk anymore.

At the end of the seventh year of Long An, the two armies in Jiangnan still confronted each other. Along the way, the Marquis of Order joined forces with the Central Plains garrison to clear up the rebellious mobs and finally returned to Jiayu Gate. The next day, the allied forces of the Western Regions occupying the city withdrew thirty miles.

At the end of this year, Gu Yun wrote fourteen personal letters to the kings of the Western Regions countries for New Year's greetings. At the same time, he sharpened his knife and prepared to kill whenever the next batch of supply was sent by the court.

This year, there was no lantern or decoration hanging outside Jiayu Gate. The situation was tense. The long awaited supply from the court finally arrived.

It's just that the person escorting was of special status.

Gu Yun came back from scouting with a group of Light Cavalry. Before he got off his horse, as he heard that *Yan Wang* was coming, he was stunned for a moment. Then, not even bothering to unload his armor, he threw behind the horse's reins and ran off.*

**T/N: he's running to meet Chang Geng, not running away from him.*

Chapter 72: Faint Dream

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It wasn't that he had never spilled sweet nothings on certain occasions. When drinking too much, he had even talked nonsense, making promises. But living for all these years, only until today did he realize that the so-called 'vow' was so heavy that it was difficult to express.

—

Gu Yun ran all the way back to the garrison. A group of privates behind him, without knowing what was happening, had to run after him as if training in the forest. The team of cavalry did not even change shifts nor adjust their formation. They just started running like mad, making the garrison appear as if they were facing great enemy. They also thought that there was a handful of foreign enemies. One by one, they held up their Qian Li Yan to look around

Inside the Black Iron Camp garrison, carriages from the capital were lining up. The manager of the supply storage had his hands full, but Gu Yun suddenly stopped without warning.

The soldiers also quickly stopped and exchanged a look with each other.

Gu Yun looked back at them in confusion. "Why are you all running in a panic?"

Soldiers: "..."

Gu Yun coughed drily and wiped away the nonexistent dust on his armor, turned his face without any obstacles and changed his demeanor to that of a leisurely stroll, casually walking inside the marshal tent with his hands behind his back.

In addition to the people on guarding duty, the patrol team had not come back yet. Gu Yun's several generals were making conversations inside, circling a person in the middle. The man was dressed in a silk court attire, with a wide sleeve hidden under the snow-white fox fur. This was the newly appointed *Yan Wang*. When

he turned around as he heard the movement, his eyes accidentally met with Marshal Gu's who was leaning against the door frame.

Yan Wang seemed surprised, then his eyes brightened up, his weather-beaten tiredness was instantly washed away. He raised his hand somewhat irrepressibly, clearing his throat slightly. This cough sounded out of tune.

With this cough, everyone turned to look at the door and rose one after another to greet: "Grand Marshal."

Some reunion and separation took only an instant, while some reunion and separation seemed to take a lifetime.

The kind that was intertwined with cold war and rage in the middle, was the kind that felt like an instant.

The kind with numerous unknown truths and ambiguous feelings that could not be put aside nor hold onto, was the kind that felt like a lifetime.

Either way, Gu Yun's thousands of feelings were pouring into his heart, blocking his vast chest, filling in with pebble and stones.

... Only after a long time did a small flow of burning hot water leak out, dissolving into his limbs incessantly - Gu Yun's palms behind his back was coated with a layer of sweat.

Like a wolf, he suppressed it and motioned the crowd to not be too overly courteous and casually walked in: "The border is not stable at this moment. Why did you come in person?"

Chang Geng said, "It will be New Year soon, I came to send some New Year's goods to the brothers."

Gu Yun replied with an *'ah',* asking with a faint look: "It had been difficult for you. Over the past six months, everyone has not been living well. It's really not easy for the court to squeeze out some rations - what decree does the Emperor have?"

When he said so, Chang Geng had to make an announcement first. As soon as the dismal scenery of the imperial edict appeared,

the generals on both sides fell on their knees. Gu Yun was stopped by Chang Geng just as he was about to kneel down to receive the decree.

Chang Geng lightly supported him: "For the Emperor's edict, Uncle only need to listen, there is no need to kneel."

He doesn't know whether it was intentional or unintentional. When Chang Geng spoke of the word 'Uncle', his tone of voice was slightly lowered.

Li Feng all day long calling him 'Uncle' had made Gu Yun tired of hearing the word, but suddenly he was called by Chang Geng like this. It seemed that a small hook was ticking him, and the four words *'courtesy cannot be abolished'* already flowing to his lips could not be let out.

In the late winter, the northwest was bitter cold, but the cold armor almost made Gu Yun break a sweat...he could only manage to listen to some sentences of the edict.

Fortunately, Li Feng's business was generally already said in the military approval request, written in the imperial edict were mostly empty words of encouragement. It did not make a difference whether they listened or not.

Until the group of generals thanked His Highness' grace and stood up, Gu Yun still did not recover.

Generally speaking, on such occasions, the highest-ranking person should come forward and speak a few proud words of service to the country on behalf of the people. Only then could the imperial edict be considered as finished to be passed on. Everyone could then get back to their business.

Gu Yun suddenly became so strangely silent, everyone had to follow suit. The generals of the Black Iron Camp all stared at him, wondering what did the Marquis had to say about this rather vague and empty imperial edict.

The surrounding was very quiet that Gu Yun finally realized he was doing something embarrassing. He casually raised his

unfathomable face and said with indistinct joy and anger: "Ah, His Majesty praised too much, this is all within our duty. Old He, send someone to prepare a little something as a feast for His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*... no need to be complicated, we are all family here. Everyone hurry up, let's finish checking the supply and equipments before dark. What are you looking at, still hadn't dismissed? Have we got nothing to do?"

The generals were awed by Marshal's unfazed attitude whether it be praise or injustice, moving out of the tent one after another. The Black Iron Camp had its own functions, its efficiency was incredibly high. In the blink of an eye, all the people were gone.

Only then did the bustling Marshal tent quieted down. Gu Yun let out a light sigh of relief, feeling that Chang Geng's eyes had been glued to him, so much so that he almost had to do his best to simply turn his head.

He wondered if it was because of the fox fur or not, but he always felt that Chang Geng had gotten thinner.

On the northwest road, Huo Long's and Miss Chen's words flashed by his heart alternately. For the first time in his life, Gu Yun faced a person but did not know where to start. His heart was full of emotions, but his face did not know what expression to make, the contradiction causing him appear rather cold and calm.

As if he had just left home the day before, he said to Chang Geng, "Come here, let me look at you."

Chang Geng did not know what his attitude was for a moment. He temporarily narrowed his unbridled vision and suddenly felt nervous.

He had made a lot of commotion in the past six months. He did not know how much of it had reached the border, neither did he know what it would be like if Gu Yun found out. When Gu Yun left the capital, the relationship between the two of them were so-so. After such a long time, it was like a jar of wine, which had been buried underground in a hurry before the ingredients were finished to be placed in.

In just a few short steps, Chang Geng's heart was like a horse-drawn lantern, no need to discuss what it felt like.

Who would have expected that Gu Yun suddenly reached out and grabbed him by the hand.

The Light Armor of the Black Iron Camp was wrapped tightly and seamlessly from shoulder to the second joint of five fingers, making Gu Yun's embrace seem very hard. The small bit of exposed fingers was as cold as the Light Armor in the cold wind of Jiayu Gate. It seemed as if the chill had pierced the fox fur on *Yan Wang* in an instant. He shivered fiercely, suddenly at a loss from the affection he received.

Gu Yun narrowed his eyes, his arms tightened slowly, the soft fur collar sweeping across his face. The scent of tranquilizer followed like a shadow. He wondered if it was his imagination, he felt that the scent was heavier than before.

For more than twenty years, the Bone of Impurity was like a file, grinding the flesh and carving the bone into such a person. Gu Yun was incredibly pained, but he did not dare to mention a word. There was a kind of obstinacy in Chang Geng's bone that he would not compromise with anyone. From such a young age, he would rather keep his eyes open until dawn every night than reveal anything to him.

If a person covered the wound so that no one could see it, someone must not pull his hands off. That was not caring, but giving him another stab.

"Zi Xi," Chang Geng whispered, somewhat unnaturally, without knowing what he was up to: "If you continue to hug me like this, I will..."

Gu Yun reluctantly suppressed his emotions, swallowed his pity, and raised his eyebrows expressionlessly: "Hm?"

Chang Geng: "..."

He did dare not say it.

His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*, who had a brilliant talent in speaking, was seldom speechless. Gu Yun laughed aloud, reaching to fix his fox fur up: "Come, I will take you out for a stroll."

They walked out of the Marshal tent side by side. The winter wind outside the gate was as sharp as a knife. The hunting flag was like an eagle spreading its wings in the air. The sky was high and the earth was wide. There were no clouds anywhere. The end of row of carriages escorting military supply could not be seen. Since the outbreak of war on four sides, everywhere seemed to be stretched to the limit. There was no telling how long it had been since such a scene so near to prosperity as this appeared.

Gu Yun stopped to look at it for a while and sighed, "How much effort would it take to clean up this chaotic mess thoroughly?"

"Sending this much first, I'll think of other ways later," Chang Geng said. "Now the Zhang Ling Law has been abolished. Several more steel armor institutes have been added to the Ling Shu Institute this month. They are recruiting talents from all Mechanics across the country, anyone who have made great achievements in the field of steel armors and machines, No matter their origin, everyone have the opportunity to enter the Ling Shu Institute. Master Feng Han even swore that there was nothing frightening about the Westerners' sea monster. If you give him time, he can do it."

"Master Feng Han had never had enough food in his life. Is it necessary to eat a bowl and pour a bowl?" Gu Yun laughed. "Besides looking scary and consuming money, that sea monster had no other use. It does not matter whether there are funds. Even with Light Cavalry, I will kick those people that dare to come to someone's territory to display their might back to their home sooner or later, you..."

He meant to say, '*you don't have to push yourself too hard*', but as he turned slightly, half of his hand wrapped in steel armor hit Chang Geng's palm. Chang Geng unconsciously grabbed hold of his painfully frozen hand, it was then covered by his broad court attire, inside the sleeve was filled with the warmth of a human body.

It was not that Chang Geng could not control himself, but due to

Gu Yun's unexpected embrace which was like an open fire, it lit up all the unrealistic expectations within him.

He looked straight at Gu Yun and asked, "What?"

Gu Yun forgot his words for the second time in a day.

From an outsider's point of view, the two stared at each other as if they were ill for a moment. Gu Yun stood stiff for a long time and did not respond. Chang Geng's face gradually grew dim, ridiculing himself inside and thought: "*As expected, it is only my imagination*."

Just as he was about to retreat, Chang Geng's pupil suddenly shrank. Under the long sleeve, Gu Yun held his hand in return. His cold and stiff fingers, with the strength of steel armor, brought no hint of avoidance or hesitation.

Gu Yun sighed, knowing in his heart that just now, he had taken this step forward in a half impulsive and half intolerant state. From now on, he could never turn back again. Chang Geng, who had been suffering from the Bone of Impurity for so many years, was not able to withstand this move. Moreover, changing his attitude back and forth was not right. It wasn't that he had never spilled sweet nothings on certain occasions. When drinking too much, he had even talked nonsense, making promises. But living for all these years, only until today did he realize that the so-called 'vow' was so heavy that it was difficult to express. The words already came to his lips, but only one sentence was left: "I want you to take care of yourself, preserving the green hills, there will be no fear of lacking firewood, no need to drive yourself to the limit. I am still here."

Chang Geng was dumbfounded. Gu Yun's sentence went in his left ear, then collectively retreated through his right. He was not able to take in a single word.

Gu Yun grew embarrassed under his stare: "Come, those country bumpkins are still waiting to see the elegant demeanor of *Yan Wang*, what is with standing here and drinking in the northwest wind?"

On the site of Black Iron Camp, it was impossible to carry out 'delicious wine' and 'beauty singing and dancing'. In wartime, the

army strictly prohibited alcohol. Anyone who dared to drink a drop will be punished by military law with no tolerance. Miss Chen, the only person here who had something to do with 'beauty', also took the position of a military doctor after Gu Yun's steel plate was taken off. Having her hands full with the wounded soldiers inside Jiayu Gate, she never showed up for half a month. Now, there was only one 'northwest flower' left. Although he could not dance, he was free to look at and did not cost money.

The so-called feast for *Yan Wang* was simply to cook a few more dishes, the generals who were not responsible for defense for the time being will accompany them. They could not even stay until late due to having to change shifts. A little bit of rest time was very precious. They dared not relax for a moment, they were all scattered before nightfall.

There was only one Gu Yun left taking a rather dazed *Yan Wang* to settle down.

"This place is very boring, isn't it? There are no good food nor delicious drink, the most extraordinary entertainment all day long is a few people come together to arm wrestle, there are no gains whether it be winning or losing," Gu Yun turned his head and said: "Did you use to get angry when you were a child because I refused to take you here? Is it worth it?"

Although Chang Geng did not touch a drop of alcohol, his footsteps felt as if he was floating on the clouds. Feeling that he was dreaming, he said in a haze: "How can it be boring?"

Gu Yun thought for a moment and drew his white jade flute from his chest. "Let me play you a newly learned song from outside the fortress?"

Chang Geng gazed deeply at the jade flute. He felt that he would not be able to wake up from this dream.

At this moment, Shen Yi had come back from reorganizing the defense system, he already heard from a distance away that His Highness *Yan Wang* was coming. He intended to come over with a heart full of complicated emotions to have a chat with him.

Unexpectedly, as he was still over a hundred meters away, his owl's eyes had already caught sight of Gu Yun pulling out his precious flute! Shen Yi instantly turned his direction as if having just witnessed cruel enemies, he ran off and disappeared.

Gu Yun's musical instrument changed from a bamboo flute to a jade flute, practiced for half a year at the bitter and cold frontier, however, his skill miraculously had not made any progress. He was now even better at urging people to urinate than before. A short burst of a foreign folk tune destroyed people's hearts. Not far away, a horse waiting for its hoof to be fixed was frightened as if surrounded by a group of wild wolves, letting out a whine like it was in pain. Meanwhile, a patrolling Black Eagle landed from the sky with unsteady footsteps, stumbled and directly fell to the ground, appearing in the posture of begging for New Year's money.

Chang Geng: "..."

At last, he found a hint that he was not dreaming - this sound that had went beyond his narrow imagination.

At the end of the song, Gu Yun, who thought he had been acting romantic, asked with a tone of voice dyed with a hint of expectation: "Is it nice?"

"..." Chang Geng hesitated for a long time and had to sincerely say, "Can clear the heart and awaken the mind, um...with the ability to make the enemy retreat."

Gu Yun raised his hand and struck his head with his flute, not at all embarrassed about his demented skill: "My aim is to wake you up. For these few days, are you going to sleep with me, or would you rather let someone tidy up a prince's tent for you?"

Yan Wang who had just partially been sobered up was struck dizzy once again by this teasing sentence, temporarily stunned in one place.

Gu Yun watched Chang Geng's ears redden, the blush spreading all over his face. He could not help thinking of Chang Geng's uncomfortable appearance, changing his clothes for him when he had

a high fever. At that time, he felt helpless, but now his heart itched incessantly. he thought: *Taking advantage of when I broke all my bones and can only lie like a corpse to get touchy with your hands, did you not think this day will come?*

Gu Yun asked, "Why don't you say anything?"

"There is no need..." Chang Geng struggled for a long time, grinding his teeth and making up his mind, "I... I also want to look at your injuries."

Gu Yun couldn't help but continue to tease him: "Only to look at my injuries?"

Chang Geng: "..."

Chapter 73: First Battle

Chapter 73: First Battle

*Art by Emi. Please **do not** reupload anywhere else, thank you!*

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"*My general,*" he thought, his heart filled with both sweetness and sorrow: "*For generations, how many renowned generals were able to safely retire? Don't these words stab at my heart?*"

———

Gu Yun's lumbar and cervical bones had problems, Chang Geng did not need to examine carefully, for after unloading the armor, he could feel it through the clothing.

He threw aside all straying thoughts and frowned. "Zi Xi, how long has it been since you last took off the Light Armor?"

"Since removing the steel plate, I've been wearing it all the time..." As Gu Yun said these words, he felt that something was not right. After a pause, he quickly added, "Well, of course, I would take

it off when bathing, I am not like the bald donkey Liao Ran who likes to be filthy."

Chang Geng reached out and pressed him down on his stomach, saying: "Don't move — you still have the heart to mock others."

Even though these generals were powerful at a young age, if they were lucky enough to live until old, most of them would suffer from numerous injuries and diseases. The malposition of the cervical and lumbar bone was almost the norm. Although the Light Armor was lightweight and convenient, it directly added to the human body, unlike the Heavy Armor that could support itself. Gu Yun was always ready for battle, not taking it off even in sleep. For a long time, the bones and muscles weren't able to rest. Chang Geng only exerted a little strength, and with just one press, the cracking sound of his bones and muscles could be heard.

"You can't feel it now, because the muscles of the waist and back can still hold up. What will you do when you get older?" Chang Geng stroked his hands heavily over his back shoulder blades and kneaded his stiff shoulders.

Whenever Shen Yi got a bit lengthy, he was always being scoffed at, but the same things, when changed to Chang Geng who would say them, Gu Yun was not at all unhappy. He listened lazily with half-closed eyes. Everything in the army was simple, even if one was the Marquis of Order. There was only a military bed in his tent, a steam lamp hanging at the head of the bed, the lights are dim, half-covering the two.

Chang Geng: "Does it hurt?"

Gu Yun shook his head and slowly murmured, "When you sent this batch of things, the wind will surely have spread out. The mob of the Western Regions coalition forces all have their own calculation. At present, the Westerners cannot unconditionally provide to them steel armors. In a few days, there will surely be some traitors who would come to surrender to us...Pfff, slow down."

Gu Yun did not respond when he pressed his shoulder, but as Chang Geng's fingers just slid down his spine near his ribs, Gu Yun

suddenly burst into laughter, "Ticklish."

"..." Chang Geng increased the strength of his fingers and almost penetrated into his bones and flesh. If he continued a little longer, he would have to press his skin to the point of almost bruising, he said helplessly, "Can you tell the difference between painful and ticklish? How can you feel ticklish with such great strength?"

"It is clear that your skills are not good," Gu Yun said, "But they will not be too sincere in their surrender. These bastards have done these two-faced things too many times. If they don't convince us, they will make our backyard fire next time. I intend to send out troops on New Year's Eve, beating them up to a feast before saying anything else."

Chang Geng pressed Gu Yun's shoulder with one hand, the other stay upright, pushed down Gu Yun's spine with his elbow: "Are the Black Iron Camp forces at Jiayu Gate strong enough?"

"If it's not enough, it must be..." Gu Yun's back arched: "Ha ha ha, stop, stop pressing."

Chang Geng did not listen to him. He pressed his elbow against him and kneaded both sides of his spine twice from head to tail. Only then did he stop slightly.

Gu Yun laughed so much that his stomach ached and his tears were almost about to come down. He gasped for breath before continuing with his words: "It is alright. Let's give a sincere reply to those with the intention of surrendering and make an appointment beforehand, stating that as long as they roll far away, we won't move. Afterwards, we will take the opportunity and attack them first, then press them under Heavy Armor and stir up a commotion, prioritizing fear. We'll scare away a few of them, and tidy up the rest one by one."

Chang Geng moved his finger slightly and laughed, "Are you not afraid of people saying that you are not trustworthy and treacherous?"

Gu Yun carelessly said: "A group of subordinate countries

rebelling, sons beating their father, what kind of benevolence they uphold... Ah! You... You amateur doctor!"

When Chang Geng pressed the acupoint at his waist, Gu Yun shouted, raising up like a living fish, hitting the bed board.

Chang Geng had no choice but to retract his hand. "Try to endure it. Has the military doctor in the camp never massaged for you?"

Gu Yun: "Well, let me think..."

"No need to think about it, who would be able to massage you?" Chang Geng stood up, replaced his finger with his palm and knelt on his side with one leg. "Then I will try to be a little lighter this time."

This time, he changed from his fingers to palm, little by little, with his palm placed close to the acupoint, gradually increasing his strength from light to heavy. Gu Yun did not know how to cooperate, the greater the strength under Chang Geng's palm, the tighter the muscles between his waist and abdomen were, the clearer the traces of the waistline under his clothing become. Chang Geng was a little dazzled in an instant, feeling that he could hug his waist with only two hands. His heart originally without any straying thoughts suddenly trembled for a moment, beginning to jump wildly without warning. The movements on his hands lightened involuntarily, giving Gu Yun another kind of 'ticklish'.

This time he did not raise up, there was a layer of indescribable sensation that went along Chang Geng's hand. Gu Yun awkwardly turned back and grabbed Chang Geng's hand. "Alright."

Chang Geng was shocked, blood from his heart all rushed up, his neck blushed red.

Gu Yun coughed dryly and asked, "What about you? When will you return to the capital?"

Chang Geng stared at him without moving his gaze: "... I'd like to leave after the sixteenth."

Gu Yun: "..."

This sentence sounded too pitiful.

Gu Yun was a little surprised, he then whispered, "You'd better not stay here for so long."

Chang Geng opened his eyes and said, "Mm, I only offhandedly said it, although the Feng Huo ticket had helped the national treasury a little, there are still a lot of pending issues in the court, I still..."

"You staying here will cause ambition to wane out." Gu Yun seriously interrupted him and said, "My ambition."

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun stretched out his hand and pulled him down. Chang Geng knelt on one knee beside the bed. Getting pulled down with his guard down, he almost hit Gu Yun on the chest.

Gu Yun intertwined his fingers into his hair, holding the back of his neck and suddenly said, "I had heard about your Feng Huo ticket."

Chang Geng's pupil shrank for a moment. Gu Yun, after a pause, did not mention the big case he had compiled to terminate the opposing party. He only told him, "Go home and look under the door and under the bed to see if you can find a couple of silver to buy a little bit from him. In the future, your brother will not have to pay back the money, just rewarding a village for retirement is enough."

Chang Geng's emotions raised up and down for a moment, he blurted out, "What do you need a village for?"

"When the foreigners are chased out, when the world is at peace, I will also stop fighting," Gu Yun whispered, gently rolling a lock of his hair.

"I thought about it a while ago. When the time comes, I will split the Black Iron Camp into three. Eagles, Armors, and Cavalry will each have one-third of the Marshal seal. They can cooperate with each other and restrain each other in the future...

"The Black Tiger emblem should still return to the Ministry of War. After the war, not only Great Liang, but also the foreign

countries, they also have to peel off a layer of skin, changing to a new group of people. It would not be a problem to maintain peace for ten to thirty years.

"Your brother also feels uncomfortable looking at me anyway, I will not serve him anymore. Matters of the future, let future generations worry about them. Let's find a village with beautiful scenery, to be, um...a dowry."

After Chang Geng listened, he did not say anything for a long time. Under the light of the steam lamp, his eyes seemed to be covered by a layer of tears: "You didn't say that last time."

Gu Yun: "Hm?"

Chang Geng: "You said last time that I do not have to be afraid, if I follow you, you will treat me well... does this also count?"

Gu Yun outright denied it: "When did I say this kind of bullcrap?"

Chang Geng relentlessly turned over an old affair: "Last January in the manor, in your room, when you pulled off my clothes."

Gu Yun was embarrassed to the point of wanting to bury himself: "That time I... I... "

Chang Geng could not help it anymore, he bowed his head and stopped his lips.

"*My general,*" he thought, his heart filled with both sweetness and sorrow: "*For generations, how many renowned generals were able to safely retire? Don't these words stab at my heart?*"

Chang Geng was really too excited, his kiss was awkward, he seemed to be both eager and hesitant at the same time. Gu Yun who had come back to his senses quickly turned the table.

Gu Yun flipped over and pressed him in his arms, he suddenly found that no wonder the ancients said that tenderness was a hero's grave — holding a loved one in the cold winter days, there was no need to be in such places as the Marquis's manor or the palace. As long as there was a small bedroom in an ordinary residential

courtyard, with a brazier enough to warm the wine, his bones had all gone soft. Let alone fight, he did not even want to enter the court.

This time, the kiss seemed to be different from the parting between life and death on the city wall. It was not so desperate, hopeless, and fierce. A corner of Gu Yun's heart suddenly collapsed, creating the softest spot, he thought to himself, "*From now on, he is my man.*"

After a long moment, both of their breathing had become somewhat erratic, Gu Yun raised his hand and turned the steam lamp, touching Chang Geng's face, he said, "You have already become exhausted on the way here, let's not tease me anymore today. Be good and have a well-rested sleep, alright?"

Chang Geng caught his hand.

Gu Yun kissed his face and said with a joke, "There will be plenty of other opportunities to deal with you in the future, let's sleep."

Chang Geng: "..."

This seemed a little different from what he had expected — but he was indeed too tired. These days, with emotions raising up and down irregularly, worn down both mentally and physically, it had not taken long for him to drift off.

Gu Yun only took a little nap. Just after the fourth period, he got up and started to put on his clothes. If Chang Geng hadn't come, these days, he had been working non-stop throughout the night.

Checking the supply in the city, how much *Ziliujin* was still available, how to distribute the troops and how to fight... a lot of arrangements that needed to be looked over by the commander, not to mention the "creating a rift" strategy. Do not be mistaken at how easy he had made it sound, the real effort still lay in the finer details. Before the battle, one more preparation would gain them one more chance to win — although the sound of Marshal Gu's flute was extremely lethal, but to besiege the city of thousands of men, if only relying on the northwest flower to show his beauty and the 'demonic sound piercing the ear' to make the enemy retreat, the means was too

simple.

Gu Yun looked down at Chang Geng who was already deep asleep, and saw that just as Miss Chen had said, his sleep was not at all peaceful.

For others, whatever they thought of by day will come to their dreams by night. However, no matter how joyful things were before going to bed, Chang Geng had no good dreams waiting for him after his eyes closed. His eyebrows had crumpled up, his face looked pale under the snowy moon outside, his fingers tightened unconsciously, grasping a corner of Gu Yun's clothes like a life-saving straw.

The Bone of Impurity was a kind of poison that greatly wore down the mind. While awake, it could be suppressed by will, but after falling asleep, it would bite back twice as hard. Gu Yun, who was always not sleeping enough, shivered after only envisioning it for a bit.

He tried to pull the corner of his clothes out but to no avail. Chang Geng, however, seemed to be shocked by the movement and held it tighter, there was even an indescribable and vague hint of brutality flashing across his expression.

The barracks was a crucial location, Gu Yun could not afford to tear his sleeves and go out to discuss the military situation with his men. He sighed and stretched his arms to unravel the pouch on Chang Geng's coat. Using the bowl on the side, he poured out a bit of tranquilizer, compressing it then burning it.

The strong scent spread all around the tent, Gu Yun put the bowl next to the pillow and bent over to place a gentle kiss on Chang Geng's forehead. Chang Geng had probably woken up but had not completely regained consciousness. In the haze, he seemed to know who was beside him. The painful look on his face decreased slightly and he finally released his hand.

Gu Yun gave him a worried look and went out under the cover of the dark.

This year New Year's Eve was incredibly desolated, the lonely

sound of firecrackers echoed from inside the gate. The cold wind swept through, and the red paper scraps flew like butterflies in the wind, but there was no sight of children lighting firecrackers anywhere.

Even in the capital city, half of the Qi Yuan Tower had collapsed, the Red Kite that the wealthy high ranking nobles and officials scrambled for was now nowhere to be seen.

A large group of refugees had crossed the river to come here, a number were frozen to death, the others starved to death. Exchanging the children for food was something that easily happened from time to time.

At first, the local governments refused to open warehouses to send out ration. Chang Geng personally took the position of an inspector the year before. On one hand, he ran back and forth between all the major trading groups for the Feng Huo tickets; on the other, he borrowed troops from General Zhong. Along the way, he dealt with a group of vile merchants and rotten officials who had hidden the rations without distributing, using flashy means to frighten them, finally giving the incredibly crowded group of refugees a place to receive some watery porridge.

Whether it be a well-off family or a poor peasant, hundreds of years and generations of people have been reluctant to eat and shop to save up some fortune. But after only half a year, all had been destroyed.

This mortal life where the vast sea turned to mulberry fields were much like the storms and torrential winds — materialistic goods could not come with birth and could not be brought along in death. Even after exhausting one's efforts, in the end, one could only do their best, then listen to fate's disposal.

The Black Iron Camp at Jiayu Gate, as usual, had prepared three carts of fireworks for the upcoming eighth year of Long An. On New Year's Eve, lanterns were hung on the city buildings, and the guards seemed particularly careless.

A scout of the Western Regions wearing dry grass sneaked to the

outside of Jiayu Gate, using the *Qian Li Yan* to keep an eye on it all day. The guards of Black Iron Camp seemed very loose, the soldiers of the post who stood as straight as javelins on weekdays were now missing by a half. Some kept scratching their heads, looking left and right, some even continuously looked back as if they were expecting something... this absence of mind was explained after a while. It turned out that a batch of letters from home came from the nearest post station. Through the *Qian Li Yan*, the Western Regions scout could see the messengers go directly to the city gate on that day. Many of the people who received the letters tear it open on the spot.

Every day there was only one Light Cavalry on the patrol, making rounds not near or far only for the sake of it, then would turn back.

The Black Iron Camp was still a human being. At the end of the year, there were always some special days that would affect their hearts and minds.

Since the arrival of Great Liang Capital envoy, the coalition forces in the whole Western Regions have been nervous, sending people day and night to stare at Jiayu Gate garrison. Until Jiayu City Tower set off fireworks, when the Central Plains people's firecrackers sounded faint as if they wanted to welcome the new year in peace, only then did the scout on duty today confirm that the Black Iron Camp did not intend to move. He quietly summoned his men to withdraw.

Just after the scout left, the 'boulder' on a small hill not far away suddenly shook and separated from the middle to both sides — it was actually a Black Eagle's armor.

The back of the Black Eagle's wings was painted in the same color as the surrounding gray stones, and even the lines were delineated with fine brushwork. At first glance, it almost appeared like the real deal. He had been waiting for the scouts of the Western Regions to move away, then quietly rushed to the sky, like a thin white fog blade across the night sky, he disappeared.

At night, using the firecrackers as the cover, the Black Iron Camp at Jiayu Gate divided into three routes and blended into the night.

The lanterns on the walls hung high in the night sky, clearly giving off the aura of liveliness. The long shadow of the lanterns were reflected on the walls of the thousand year-old ancient city, yet it felt unspeakably lonely and desolate.

At the capital, business piled up like mountains. Chang Geng only had time to talk a few words to Gu Yun. It was still the old year when he already had to depart for his return. On New Year's Eve, he happened to arrive at the wounded soldier's center inside the gate. Chen Qing Xu had already received the news, holding a wooden bird, waiting for him at the door of the center.

Meeting again half a year later, there was no embarrassment between them. It seemed as if Chen Qing Xu never opposed Chang Geng taking over the Lin Yuan emblem, and Chang Geng never changed her note in secret. The Lin Yuan emblem had been handed over. Whatever her opinions might be on the choice of her companions, at this time, she must obey the command of the wooden emblem.

"Your Highness, don't go in anymore," whispered one of the attendants. "Only a few of them still have all their arms and legs. It would not put you in a good mood to see them."

"You already feel unwell by looking at them, what do you think those who had lost their arms and legs feel?" Chang Geng glanced at him, the guard blushed from embarrassment.

"I came to give New Year's greeting to the brothers who serve the country and the people," Chang Geng turned to Chen Qing Xu. "The reward and support funds from the court are being sent down, they could also be considered as New Year gifts...just in time, I will stop here to wait for a while."

Chen Qing Xu: "What are you waiting for?"

"News of victory." Chang Geng said, "The first news of victory, I will be bringing it back while on the way, for the Grand Council to discuss the next step for suppressing the countries in the Western Regions."

Chapter 74: First Victory

Sorry for the long wait ;^;

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This was the first real news of victory of Great Liang since half of the country was besieged.

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Chen Qing Xu carefully watched Chang Geng's face and said, "I heard that Your Highness has been on a non-stop journey. First went south to Jiangbei to rectify the cruel officials and traitors along the canal, then returned to the capital to instruct the Ministry of Housing and the Ling Shu Institute, then rushed to the northwest before the New Year no matter the cost. You have not rested, yet you seem to still be in a good mood?"

This was quite strange. When she left the capital, Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity was almost beyond control. She assumed that as he had been exhausted both physically and mentally for more than half a year, there was no telling what stage would he be in. When she received the Lin Yuan wooden bird, Chen Qing Xu had been worried about seeing that ominous red glint in his eyes.

Who knew that Chang Geng's face was much better than she imagined. The state of *'even if the heaven falls, I am at peace'* seemed to have returned on Yan Wang's body.

It was almost the same as those years when he followed General Zhong while living a simple life, wandering the pugilist world.

But there seemed to be another difference: he did not appear to be bland to the extreme as before, he now carried a hint of smoke and fire of the mortal world.

"Only running a few errands, it isn't much." Chang Geng said indifferently. "It is said that everything is difficult at the beginning,

but in truth, I don't think it's necessarily the most difficult at the beginning. You see, now the whole dynasty has reached the point of breaking. Even if I were to do a more horrible job, the only thing that could happen is that the Westerners will surround the capital once again, there are no worse outcomes. This matter will soon be accustomed to by the gentlemen in the court, they would not blame me much."

"... His Highness's heart truly...shines brighter near the light, you have received parts of the Marquis's passed down experiences." Chen Qing Xu obscurely pulled out Gu Yun, who never took anything to heart even once. Then, as she carefully assessed it, she felt that there was some truth in Chang Geng's words, she said, "Yes. Sometimes, compared to rebuilding the nation, it is more difficult to accept the descending path after prosperity."

"That does not affect my business." Chang Geng said to her with a somewhat casual attitude, "Zi Xi had poor health since young. He had to rest as soon as possible. If he no longer fights in wars, he would not stay in the Black Iron Camp for many years. If he left, I would follow him."

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

It took her a long time to realize who this 'Zi Xi' was referring to. Turned out, the thing that had covered thousands of miles of wind and dust on His Highness *Yan Wang*'s face was not 'good complexion' but the ambience of spring!*

**ambience of spring refers to the glow of someone who's in love.*

Chen Qing Xu did not know what word to say for a time — if such feelings that went beyond the norm could blossom, then a grown woman who was not that unsightly like herself spending all her time in the midst of men, how come no one had ever expressed anything towards her?

Was her naturally cold face too lethal?

...Or perhaps, although General Gu's upper beam was incorrect, his lower beam was not at all distorted, and the strictness of his rules

in the army were that much awe inspiring?

Nevertheless, Chang Geng's careless remark, although it aroused a sorrowful emotion for Miss Chen, it was no doubt an equivalent to giving her a tranquilizing pill.

Although the Northwest Frontier was far from the Emperor, His Highness *Yan Wang*'s tactics of constantly changing attitudes in the court could still be heard.

Aside from immense admiration, Chen Qing Xu also had some worries that he would sink into power in the future. It was not that she did not trust in Chang Geng's character, but the Bone of Impurity would always remain a dark cloud that could not be dispersed. For three to five years, he could still maintain himself, but what about in ten or eight years? Would power and poison speed up the erosion of his mind? At that time, he would be holding the Lin Yuan wooden emblem in his hand. With such great power, who would be able to stop him?

It was not until she heard this that she felt a little relieved. No matter what, as long as the Marquis was alive and well, there would always be someone in the world who could pull him back.

In this way, Chen Qing Xu was somewhat secretly glad that Lin Yuan emblem was not affected by her one opposing vote, and was finally handed over to Chang Geng. Otherwise, Great Liang would not be able to have room to take a breath in a short half year period.

This breath finally slowly accumulated on New Year's Eve into the force that swallowed mountains and rivers — the Black Iron Camp divided into three routes, launching a surprise attack on the Western Regions coalition garrison.

The Western Regions Coalition Army and Jiayu Gate had been engaged in a back and forth battle with each other. For a long time, they had not received any supplies from the Westerners. Their own technology was not good. The broken armors and chariots could not be repaired. Looking around, their allies were only fools who could not be described by words, ego could not count on it at all. They already had the intention to withdraw.

On the same day, the coalition of the sixteen countries received a scolding report, saying that Black Iron Camp was still motionless, thus they have let their guard down.

The guards were loitering, the commanders of all countries were unprepared, coming together and concentrating on quarreling, the whole station was dim, and the sudden appearance of black crows truly felt like they fell from the sky.

Many people would like to rush into battle without putting on their pants and be swept away by the Black Iron Camp like fierce wind blowing across fallen leaves.

There was a small country far away realizing that the situation was not good. When quickly calculating their own strength that had no foundation, the king and the commander-in-chief made a decision in time to first of all lead the crowd to run.

Their run was like a signal. The whole coalition army was in an uproar. When everything was out of control, Black Eagles poured a large amount of copied letters from the sky and scattered them all over like paper money. Before that, several small western countries had written some personal letters in an attempt to ally with Gu Yun in secret. At this time, they were mass reprinted by the Marquis of Order and were scattered in the air. Combined with the first batch of escaping bunch, it appeared to be particularly shocking.

Before the small Western countries could swear their oaths to their allies in a desperate manner, the sound of Great Liang's horn resembling the roar of mountain and sea came from the sky.

A Black Eagle ordered several small rebellious countries in Great Liang Mandarin and the common language of the Western Regions, he declared bluntly, "When you have surrendered, you will disarm yourself and withdraw to one side. If the unconscious weapons were to hurt the ally by mistake, the Black Iron Camp will not take responsibility!"

The coalition forces in the Western Regions blew up. Who would have the time to stop and read and analyze the contents on the paper carefully? A quick glance at the beginning and the end revealed the

nauseating pronunciation plus the lenient attitude — they had regarded this as evidence and already believed it for eighty to ninety percent.

The contingents of all the countries in the Western Regions were in disorder. With strong enemies outside and traitors inside, no one they ran into appeared to be the good guys. At present, regardless of ally or enemies, they all but engaged in a fight with one another.

It was the first day of the eighth year of Long An, leaving the old to welcome the new.

The Black Iron Camp that had been dormant and retreated, after the return of their commander, they finally showed their fangs which had been suppressed for half a year. The iron sword roared westward, like cutting through vegetable, sweeping across the western region coalition garrison.

The coalition troops were defeated and fled in all directions in a short time. Overnight, they could witness the effectiveness in combat of the Black Iron Camp that could sweep eighteen tribes with thirty Heavy Armors.

On the second day of the New Year, a group of remnants of the Western Regions were defeated and retreated. The Black Iron Camp captured the King of Kucha kingdom, the head of the 16-nation coalition forces.

At the same time, the report was sent to the center of wounded soldiers inside the gate.

This was the first real news of victory of Great Liang since half of the country was besieged. The whole center was boiling up. Whether it was a group of wounded Northwest soldier lacking arms and had broken legs, or decent attendants of *Yan Wang*, they all became one, hugging one another and crying together.

Chang Geng heavily let out a sigh of relief. He wanted to open his mouth and tell his men to get ready to return to the capital at once, but no one seemed to hear him. He shook his head helplessly and gave a handkerchief to Chen Qing Xu, who was shedding tears in

silence next to him.

They had been waiting too long for this day. A building could collapse in the wind and rain, however, as long as the rock beam and pillar remained intact, the Black Iron Camp remained strong, there would always be a day where they could tidy up the ruined nation.

On the fourth day of the new year, the coalition troops in the Western Regions retreated to the entrance of the Silk Road. The news of their whereabouts were leaked by the Han slaves they captured and were ambushed by the people of Lou Lan. When the coalition troops in the Western Regions invaded Great Liang, they once occupied Lou Lan, killed their old king, and forced the young drunkard prince to exile. This time, they finally had the chance to take vengeance.

At this point, the coalition forces have suffered heavy losses and have been defeated.

On the fifth day, the Black Iron Camp recovered twenty-seven passes on the Silk Road and directly attacked the former garrisons of the coalition forces. All the foreigners who had not yet had time to evacuate were captured.

Shen Yi ran to the camp tent and reported, "Grand Marshal, the tortoises in the Western Regions had shrunk their necks back, handed over a letter for a peace treaty, fearing that they would not be able to explain to their Western parents. They wanted to exchange the Han people they had taken for prisoners. You see..."

Gu Yun instantly agreed: “Yes!”

As soon as this remark came out, there was an uproar in the Marshal's tent, the line "Marshal please think carefully" came and went one after another.

Shen Yi was shocked: "Marshal, the war report have not been sent to the court yet. There are many important members of foreign states among these prisoners. To arbitrarily deal with them... is that alright?"

Gu Yun raised a hand to interrupt his voice: "If the Black Iron Camp did not retreat at that time, these people should still be inside the borders at this time. Even if they become refugees, at least they can queue up for bowls of porridge to drink and will not be taken away for no reason and humiliated as livestock... I am not blaming you, gentlemen. The withdrawal order was sent by *Yan*...by me, Black Iron Camp was able to be preserved, thus the battle today could be won. The captured and humiliated civilians are still waiting for me. You could mistreat anyone but you cannot mistreat the people who had given outstanding service."

As soon as this was said, the tent was silent, no one raised any objections — but they soon found that Gu Yun had no intention of 'arbitrarily' disposing the prisoners of war.

The two sides exchanged their captives at the agreed place and time. However, just as the coalition forces in the Western Regions planned to leave, a Light Cavalry suddenly took a wooden arrow pole without an arrow point and gave the chest of a nearby man a light stab. The man had already placed a chicken blood bag in his chest, it broke as soon as it was poked. From a distance, blood was gushing out, making it appear like he had been hit by an arrow.

The man who was 'hit by the arrow' was very dedicated, swaying around on the spot once, then safely entered the process of pretending to be dead to the end.

Gu Yun, facing the enemy now with their eyes wide open, relentlessly ordered: "These bunch worse than pigs and dogs are addicted to traitorous and treacherous means. Using the name of exchanging prisoners, they secretly attacked our army, take them down!"

The Light Cavalry at the front scattered, dozens of Heavy Armor came out from the crowd. When Gu Yun's voice just finished, heavy artillery had sounded.

When Gu Yun settled the rebellion in the Western Regions, he was still a young bird, he was not so shameless. Later, when the Silk Road was opened and the two sides exchanged friendship, he always maintained the demeanor of a greater country, restrained his

subordinates, and always had the attitude of ‘benevolence, righteousness, courtesy, wisdom and faith’ of a scholarly general*.

**referring to generals who are well educated and have elegant demeanor*

Who knew that he could claim a deer to be a horse, turn black to white, telling lies without blinking!

The Western Regions coalition forces who had indicated their purpose of exchanging prisoners and the captives themselves were both in shock, but they had no time to react furiously. The ambush Black Eagle fell from the sky, cutting off their back route, shooting arrows from the air. The signal bullets were destroyed on their way up. They were cleared out after the blink of an eye.

Gu Yun then turned to Shen Yi and said, "I borrowed the prisoners of war to use as fishing bait. It can not be regarded as ‘unauthorized disposal’, can it?”

Shen Yi: "..."

Most of the prisoners from Central Plains captured by the Western Regions Coalition Forces were businessmen who came from thousands of miles away to make a living. One wrong thought have doomed them, as they did not follow Du Wan Qian to withdraw. It had led to this outcome.

Some of these people did small business on their own, others went with the caravan, men, women and children altogether, leaving a total of more than 30 people — the rest have died in the hands of the Western Regions.

That night, the Central Plains people, who had been humiliated by all kinds of means as if cattle and horses, eventually returned to their homeland under the escort of the Black Iron Camp. There were still more than ten yards away from the Silk Road Pass, they had not passed through yet, but someone had taken the lead in kneeling down first, hitting the ground with his head and cried aloud. The cries echoed at the Silk Road entrance, the lone birds flying past could not bear to listen.

Gu Yun waved his hand and ordered the escort officers to stop and wait silently without urging them.

Among these prisoners, there was only one who did not cry. The man was about thirty years old, his appearance was gentle like a scholar. Leading a boy of about sixteen or seventeen years old, he came to Gu Yun and stood at a distance, separated by a group of soldiers.

A personal guard said in Gu Yun's ear, "Marshal, I heard on the way that it seems that this scholar was the one who gathered together the refugees that were captured by the people of the Western Regions, saving many, and also came up with schemes to reveal the whereabouts of those dog thieves, so that the Prince of Lou Lan could have a chance to attack."

Gu Yun was stunned at first. Before he could think about it, he saw the scholar kneeling down with the young man beside him.

Although Gu Yun had just finished playing hooligans, he dared not treat these people lightly. He hurriedly said, "Sir, there is no need to do so. Please get up quickly. What are you called?"

The scholar refused his support and murmured, "Marshal, my name is Bai, last name Chu, a poor scholar who is always failing examination and has no good future. Because my parents died early and the family was poor, I had given up on it. Last year, I brought my younger brother to the Silk Road to write and calculate for people to make a living. Unexpectedly, Bai, though not talented, is also a learner of wise men. I know the teaching 'Do not bring humiliation to your ancestors nor to yourself, preserving your righteousness, manners, that is the way of a scholar'* but the situation forced us to fall into the enemy. In order to save my life, I have let myself be discriminated by the those dog thieves, imposing punishments…"

**A reference to Sima Qian, a famous historian who was punished through castration, and instead of committing suicide out of shame, wrote the "Records of the Grand Historian"*

Gu Yun was shocked and did not know what to say for a moment. He stepped forward from the crowd and went up to the two

brothers in person and said quietly, "We were late."

Bai Chu: "This Bai had reserved his last breath until now only to see the Emperor recover the lost land with his own eyes."

Gu Yun solemnly put his hand together: "Master's merit is great, I will make sure to report this to the court."

Bai Chu laughed low: "How dare this broken body dare to talk of merit, but this peasant have one daring request."

Gu Yun: "Please say so."

Bai Chu said, "I have a younger brother named Zheng, who is sixteen years old and have not had time to come of age. Fortunately, he is born with strength. Although most of the six skills* of a gentleman are not good, but the skill of riding and shooting are still acceptable. I know that the Black Iron Camp is a national weapon, the generals are all elite. With his qualifications, he is not deserving of joining. I only hope for him to become a servant running errands next to Marshal. In the future, I pray that there will be spirits in the heavens, to bless him to grow up to be a man who stands upright."

**Six skills includes: courtesy, music, archery, driving horse carriage, calligraphy and accounting.*

Gu Yun looked at the teenager and saw that he appeared strong and genuine, he did not interrupt them, only standing on the side wiping tears from his red eyes. Gu Yun sighed quietly, "Sir, please get up quickly. These are all trivial matters..."

Bai Chu pressed the young man's head forward a few steps and forced him to kneel in front of Gu Yun: "Bow to the Marshal."

Bai Zheng was a sincere child, bowing wholeheartedly as he was told, the stones under his head were vibrating from his bow. Helpless, Gu Yun had to bend down to help him up, but as he just touched the shoulders of the teenager, he was stunned, only to feel that the shoulders of the child did not stop shaking, it was not like excitement, but... fear.

Several thoughts suddenly flashed through Gu Yun's heart ——

The Western Regions coalition forces were attacked at Silk Road due to the leak of their tracks and suffered heavy losses. How come they were not at all angry?

The prisoners of the Central Plains were the first to take the heat. Being the most suspicious, they would certainly be executed by the Western Regions troops. Not mentioning other people, as the leader, whether or not he was related to this matter, it was absolutely certain that he would be implicated. The enemy would not care whether there was injustice or not, and there was no need for evidence either. With only a little bit of doubt, they would not preserve this man's life.

In the exchange, releasing the elderly, weak, sick and disabled people were enough, how could they even return this Bai Chu?

Back then, he could already faintly sense something was unusual, but when Bai Chu uttered those kind of words in the background of a dozen of people's mourning and crying, his heart was both agitated and guilty for a moment and had not thought about it further.

As Gu Yun was alerted, he retreated back immediately. Just then, he heard a loud roar. The whole body of ‘Bai Chu’ swelled up, his thin face became round, his skin cracked. A mask made of human skin fell from his face.

"Marshal!"

Without hesitation, a Heavy Black Iron Armor rushed over, hugged Gu Yun in one hand, turned around while moving and shielded him with three layers of steel plates on his back——

There was a loud, deafening noise. That ‘Bai Chu’ exploded, a huge heat wave swept all around. The body of the juvenile kneeling was separated on the spot. Gu Yun's ears were buzzing, a sharp pain suddenly arrived, his back strongly collided with the ground, the front of his eyes went dark.

Chapter 75: Love Letter

*After constantly nagging Emi to upload her arts for weeks now, she is finally going to post on Twitter! Her account is _may_rain, link in the inline comment ^^*

—

Chang Geng was composed on the outside, but his heart was going crazy.

—

Shen Yi, who was ordered to cut off the back route, heard a loud noise. He looked back, almost spitting out his lungs from fright, instinctively wanting to run towards it for a moment.

But General Shen, who had been rolling around at the frontier for many years, was no longer a spirited scholar in the Ling Shu Institute of that year. In a state of shock, the steed under him only shook its head once, Shen Yi had already come back to his senses, pulling the rein tightly. He instantly made a long whistle with his lips: "Light Cavalry do not fall into disorder. Black Eagles went to investigate the enemy's unusual movements, give my orders..."

But he did not even finish his words when a scouting Black Eagle landed in front of him: "Report! Marshal!"

"Slow down, Marshal is busy," Shen Yi stopped him. "What's the matter? Just tell me first."

"General Shen, after the withdrawal of the sixteen countries in the Western Regions, they have reorganized their drums and flags, collected eighteen battle chariots that have been preserved from various countries. They are marching towards our base, I'm afraid they intend to fight back..."

Shen Yi murmured, "How many people are there?"

"Not counting the chariots, observing from the sky, armor and cavalry have at least at twenty to thirty thousand..."

"General Shen!"

A personal guard of Gu Yun came rolling and crawling towards him. Shen Yi abruptly turned his head, almost tightening his neck tendons, his scalp was numbing and tingling. He could not imagine what would happen if Gu Yun truly met with an unfortunate accident. How could they be able to guard the twenty-seven passes at the entrance of the Silk Road?

Would they have to retreat once again?

The soldier gasped for breath. "Marshal had ordered you to execute the king of Kucha Kingdom in front of the two armies, then hang his head on the flagpole, cutting off all means of retreat. The Black Iron Camp will not leave a single soldier to guard the city, directly sending out troops to meet the enemy!"

Shen Yi listened to the first half of the sentence. His heart that was hanging in the middle about to be spat out fell back to his abdomen, he could hardly hear the second half of the sentence. Breaking the usual habit, he made the nervous guard repeat it once more, only then did he shout, "The, *cough*, the rebels are at the end of their struggle, the grasshoppers' final moment after the last harvest after autumn. Listen to my orders and prepare for war!"

At the moment of the explosion, Gu Yun was protected by a Heavy Armor.

The body of the Black Armor officer was separated on the spot. Gu Yun fainted for a moment, spitting out a mouthful of blood, one ear instantly going deaf.

After waking up, Gu Yun did not pay anything else in mind. The first reaction was that the enemy wanted to take this opportunity to fight back. The Western Regions rebelled twice, their deep hatred for Great Liang was not something that could be resolved in one or two generations. At present, they were suppressed by the Black Iron Camp growing at a rapid speed, perhaps they finally know fear. This would probably be their last blow.

He Rong Hui was scared to death, pulling Gu Yun out from

under Heavy Armor. Gu Yun's body was soaked in blood — there were his own, there were someone else's. In this second, all the strength accumulated in his body exploded. With his heart fluctuated with innumerable thoughts, he seized He Rong Hui's arm and passed on the order to execute the prisoner and heed the battle. Afterward, he seemed to burn out his last strength and intermittently said, "The related military situations will now be handled by Shen... Ji Ping, he will be temporarily in charge in my stead, do not let words get out..."

He Rong Hui almost cried.

Gu Yun's ear was buzzing. For a moment, he could not hear anything clearly. Naturally, he could not perceive the sorrowful sound coming from others. He only murmured, "Block the news.. what happened today, if anyone dares to reveal a...a single word, will be punished by military law... Go to the wounded soldier's center and invite Miss Chen to come... *urgh*..."

As Gu Yun said this, there was a sharp pain in his chest — the old wounds obviously had not yet had time to heal, but there were already new ones. At present, a burst of blackening occurred in his vision, but his mouth was still not idle: "Wait, wait! Tell the messenger to make certain that the carriage of *Yan Wang* had left before inviting Miss Chen. First, don't tell her what had happened here, invite her in secret, and be sure to..."

He could no longer go on talking, the hand that was gripping He Rong Hui fell down powerlessly for a moment. He Rong Hui was scared half to death. He shakily extended his hand to check for his breathing, feeling that although it was weak, for better or worse, it somehow still remained. Only then did He Rong Hui gasp for breath. He stooped and held Gu Yun who had fainted.

Shen Yi exchanged a look with the red-eyed He Rong Hui from afar, he then whistled and roared angrily, "Behead the King of Kucha, all brothers, follow me to eliminate the rebels!"

The coalition forces in the Western Regions knew that they could not match the Black Iron Camp. On their hasty retreat, they put together a menacing plan and arranged a suicide soldier well-versed in disguise from the Western Regions to assassinate him. At this time,

as they heard the explosion, assuming that they had succeeded, they were planning to take down the Silk Road intersection with one move. Who knew that even before reaching the Silk Road, they were already confronted with the entire Black Iron Camp coming out of their hive.

The explosion seemed to have completely angered the black steel god of war that was countless in number. The commander-in-chief of Kucha thought that they could welcome their king's return by pushing back the Black Iron Camp. Unexpectedly, at that moment when he looked up, he could see the king's head hanging high on the flagpole, waving along with the flag resembling a knotted mocking tassel. The commander of Kucha let out an *'ah'* and fell directly off his horse.

The leading general of the Black Iron Camp had an iron mask over his face. One could not tell who was under his heavy black iron armor. As if afraid that the enemy could not see what was hanging on the flag, the general waved his hand in the fierce wind. A Light Cavalry turned the Wind Slasher into a flower, cutting a rope on the flagpole. The King of Kucha fell to the ground. The commander rolled over, holding the king's head, staring wide eye at the bald head for a moment. Finally, he could not help and let out a cry before the two armies.

This voice seemed to serve as the horn of Black Iron Camp. In the next moment, Heavy Armors moved as a whole. The commander, dressed in Light Armor, sitting on the horse's back, raised the Wind Slasher in his hand, slashing down suddenly. Only then did the silent twenty thousand black crows started advancing, the sound of shouting and killing were suppressed under their rumbling footsteps.

The officers and soldiers in the Western Regions were terrified. Apart from Gu Yun, which other general in the Black Iron Camp could dare to arbitrarily kill the King of Kucha directly?

Did Gu Yun not die?

Looking at this situation, not only did they fail to bomb Gu Yun to death, they had instead angered the Black Iron Camp.

This night, the sea of sand was dyed in blood. Black Heavy Armors confronted the Western Regions chariots, forcing the enemy to retreat twenty miles away from the ancient Silk Road. The Western Regions allied forces failed to fight back and was scattered once again. The Black Iron Camp pursued them viciously all the way to the territory of the Western Regions, slaughtered nearly 10,000 enemies, eliminating all of Kucha's nobility.

Chen Qing Xu had only just sent *Yan Wang*'s convoy bringing the news of victory back to the capital. Before she could get over the excitement and joy that brought her to tears, two Black Eagles flew directly to the Northwest wounded soldiers center: "Miss Chen, Marshal has invited you."

When Gu Yun woke up again, someone was forcing him to open his mouth to give medicine.

Gu Yun gasped for breath and felt a sharp burning pain in his heart and lungs, tears were almost about to come out. He still had not fully regained consciousness, thinking vaguely, *"Is death going to come soon?"*

As soon as the idea came out, Gu Yun gritted his teeth.

"*No*," he thought, "*Jia Lai is still alive, Jiangnan is still under siege, I cannot die.*"

This drive was like a dose of chicken blood, directly pumped into his heart. Gu Yun was startled, waking up.

Shen Yi, who was feeding him medicine, could not pry his mouth open even after trying to the point of breaking in a cold sweat. Suddenly, he could feel Gu Yun's jaw become more relaxed and was able to swallow it himself. Overjoyed, he continuously shouted, "Zi Xi! Zi Xi, open your eyes and look at me."

Chen Qing Xu hurriedly said, "It is alright as long as he regains consciousness and is able to drink the medicine. General Shen, don't

shiver, you will choke him. Leave it to me!"

Gu Yun did not die in the hands of the Western Regions suicide bomber, who would have thought he would fall into a life and death situation due to a bowl of medicine of that Shen. Somewhere, he still had a little strength saved, he struggled to push that source of danger away. As soon as he moved, the whole marshal tent boiled up. A group of large and crude men cried out, hurriedly running over trying to help.

Chen Qing Xu could not bear it any longer: "Enough! Everyone get out!"

Gu Yun could keenly sense a peculiar fragrance of a woman. He knew that Chen Qing Xu had come. Turning his head slightly, he avoided the medicine bowl that was delivered to his mouth, trying to open his eyes with great effort.

Chen Qing Xu knew what he was worried about. She quickly wrote in his palm word by word, "*Yan Wang had returned to the capital. He does not know.*"

Gu Yun's pale lips curved up slightly. It seemed to be a smile, he drank the medicine reluctantly. His spirit was dispersed again.

Gu Yun's organs were injured, combined with the recurrence of old wounds. He repeatedly broke into a fever throughout the night. The four words of *'death with everlasting regret'* supported him like a large rock. The next day, he was able to climb up under the amazement of others. Drinking medicine like water, he summoned all the generals under him and listened to every war report.

When the meeting was over, Chen Qing Xu brought a bowl of medicine to him. Gu Yun drank it. He wondered if it was due to the strong collision on his head, or the explosion had hurt his ears, but those ears that always relied on medicine to function did not stop ringing.

Putting down the empty bowl, Gu Yun asked in the first sentence, "When did *Yan Wang* leave?"

Chen Qing Xu saved words like saving gold: "Early in the third day of the new year."

Gu Yun breathed a sigh of relief — the Western Regions front was under his control. As long as Chang Geng had left, words of this matter would never reach the capital.

So far, he was at ease in both public and private matters, automatically counting the matter as a false alarm. He laughed at Chen Qing Xu and said: "I have been too eager lately and have not thought carefully, making myself to be a laughing stock."

But Chen Qing Xu did not laugh, she instead pulled over a chair and sat down, appeared to be ready to engage in a long conversation: "Marquis, I have a few words I must make clear to you."

Gu Yun was stunned.

Some doctors were quick-tempered — as soon as the patients did not cooperate even slightly, they would immediately be scolded. Others doctors were the sheep-raising type — anyone who sought them, they will be treated; if they were not willing to be treated, they will not be forced to, it was up to them if they wanted to die.

Chen Qing Xu undoubtedly belonged to the latter. No matter if Gu Yun wore the steel plate to go on the front line, or repeatedly increased the dosage of drugs willfully, she had not said anything, she had rarely ever shown such a grave look.

Gu Yun: "Miss Chen, please."

Chen Qing Xu: "There is no place on the body that is acting alone, the eyes and ears are connected with the organs. The aftermath of the Marquis's poison since childhood has continued to this day. But in this campaign, you have been injured continuously, affecting the lungs, five internal organs were in a state of unrest — since the chaos in the Western Regions has been suppressed, in my opinion, it would be better for Marshal to take the opportunity of escorting prisoners of war to return to the capital to rest one or two days, otherwise..."

Gu Yun: "Otherwise, one day, even panacea or elixir, nothing will be able to cure me anymore, is that right?"

Chen Qing Xu face did not show any changes. She nodded and said, "The Marquis's own body, you certainly must understand it best."

Gu Yun replied with an *'Mm'*. For a long time, he did not say a word.

When people were in their twenties and thirties, it was very difficult to feel the sense of 'old' and 'sick' brought about by the passage of time. Occasionally, there would be days where they'd feel uncomfortable, but they did not think of it in a serious direction either, there were no real sensation. Such lines as 'wish you well' and 'take good care' coming from others mostly resembled wind passing by one's ears. There were too many things lined up before this rotten body: fame and wealth, loyalty and righteousness, family and duty... even romance, love and hatred.

Gu Yun was not an exception either.

Until this moment.

He always thought his final destination was to bury his bones in the frontier, dying for this nation. He regarded himself as a handful of fireworks — after blowing out, it could be said that he had reserved the renowned named of the Gu family with its every loyal members.

But a Chang Geng suddenly emerged out of nowhere, pushing his established trajectory away from the original direction. He could not help himself from having delusions, wishing for more — for example, after the nation came to its end, there would still be a few years left where he was not sick, not hurt, to save them for Chang Geng.

If he died early and Chang Geng carried the evil curse of the barbarian woman alone, what would he do in the future? If one day the Bone of Impurity broke out, if he really did ...who would look after him? Who would care for him?

Chen Qing Xu was not good with talking, she was afraid that her clumsy speech would not be able to persuade Gu Yun. Unexpectedly, Gu Yun had not waited for her to draft her thoughts inside, he suddenly said, "I know, thank you, there are more things that will need to trouble Miss Chen in the future. Now under this situation, resting may not be possible, but as long as I do not need to enter the palace and there is no emergency military situation, I will minimize using that medicine as much as I can, okay?"

Chen Qing Xu was stunned, she suddenly found that Gu Yun seemed to have changed.

Three generations of Black Iron Camp were handed down to Gu Yun, as solid as metal. A single sentence from him became the order of prohibitions with absolute authority. With Gu Yun blocking the news, the capital only received the news of the grand victory at the Western Regions.

Master Feng Han was crying as he listened on the court. The entire country was boiling up. Even as Gu Yun later wrote a letter asking for forgiveness, saying that he had arbitrarily beheaded the King of Kucha, this only seemed like a trivial matter. Either Way, Gu Yun's tough means on the battlefield was not something that happened within a day or two. Even Li Feng felt that this was very similar to something he would do.

Only Chang Geng frowned at the report sent to the Grand Council —— although he could not explain why, he had a feeling there was something else hidden in this.

Unfortunately, before waiting for him to think about it, the Black Eagle envoy sent another letter: "Your Highness, this is the home letter from the Marquis to you."

The last time Gu Yun wrote home to him, it was within the two years that the man had just left for the Silk Road. There were two in

total, one of which was written by Shen Yi in his stead.

Chang Geng maintained first-class martial skill of self-restraint, received the letter and gave thanks calmly, courteous words both sincere and caring came out of his lips. The Black Eagle envoy who had not seen much of the world was tearful. Wishing he could bow deep and make an oath to repay the home country, he was sent away in a dizzying state.

When the envoy left, Chang Geng immediately dismissed the young eunuchs who were accompanying him on both sides. He could not wait to open it. He was handy by nature, his opening motion was also of utmost care. The envelope was not torn for a little, it could even be reused.

As soon as it was opened, a small dried apricot blossom fell out.

It was as if Gu Yun had been possessed by Shen Yi, talking of every matters big and small. He naturally had a sharp tongue, describing the cowardly behavior of the Western Regions coalition army without sparing any details, the scene of the enemy wetting themselves seemed as if it had appeared in front of him. If there were still people left in the military office, they would be frightened — who had ever witnessed *Yan Wang* laughing so happily behind the desk with papers and reports piling up like mountains?

At the end, Gu Yun wrote again: *There are several apricot trees at the crossing, harmed by the flame of war. The trunk of the tree is burnt, even most of the insects and ants could not live. I had assumed they had died. But one day as I came back to camp from patrol, I saw these dead trees had met spring, a flower bud was raising from the ash, blooming overnight. It is both pitiable and endearing. The army is filled with those that does not know how to appreciate beauty. Talk of admiring flowers would only resemble playing music for an ox's ears, hence I have acted first and plucked a branch to play with you...*

In the *Kai* handwriting that could be passed down for generations, there was a sentence, Chang Geng could vaguely recognize that it said: "*wishing I could cut several branches of plum blossoms in the Marquis's manor myself in the early spring of next year*", but later perhaps he thought it would be unlucky to discuss the

future, he then painted them off again and signed his name.

He did not know whether it was intentional or coincidental. There was a faint imprint left behind by the apricot branch, cutting across the word 'Gu'. One could sense the fragrance coming looking at the letter pressing atop the flower mark, the unmatched elegance is indescribable.

Chang Geng was composed on the outside, but his heart was going crazy.

Whether these young masters of noble family appeared crude, mindless, or careless, there was not a single one who did not know of these little teasing tricks, they all had a few up their sleeve.

Chang Geng could not help recalling the space between elegance and improper when Gu Yun had had too much that time. Instead of being jealous about the romance and affairs that might or might not have happened, he felt that Gu Yun was very adorable this way.

Chang Geng sipped a cup of cooled tea and read the home letter three or four times over from beginning to end, wishing that he could imprint each and every word in his mind, so that even with his eyes closed, he could recreate an identical one. Only then did he put the letter and the dried flowers in the pouch, keeping them close to him.

He then wrote the words 'noble family' on one side of the paper and closed his eyes slightly.

The word *'Yan Wang'* coming out of the lips was the representation of royalty. At the moment of national crisis, the interests between the noble family and royalty were the same. As long as he did not act out of place, there would be absolutely no one who would be blind enough to jump out and hinder him. Many well-off noble families with plenty of money to spare even expressed great support for the *Feng Huo* ticket. This time, more or less, a bit of their wealth had been given out...

But what would be the next step?

Once the border crossing started engaging in wars, it would

devour an enormous amount of military expenses. The endless stream of refugees were still crossing the river to come. People in Great Liang were panic-stricken and no longer had the heart to do business. The amount of gold and silver gathered in emergency by the *Feng Huo* tickets would soon come to an end. The court could never live on borrowed money.

Reforming the farmland system, tax system, civil and commercial system was imminent. Wherever one touched, it would have to affect the bones and muscles.

At that time, all the noble families of the court would become his enemies.

Chang Geng's warm expression from just now that was still carrying a hint of a smile had turned cold, he flicked the wolf hair brush and struck a cross on the word 'noble family'.

Under the lamp, the young prince appeared very handsome, yet incredibly cold.

Master Feng Han or Ge Ban Xiao or Miss Chen... and even Gu Yun, they all seemed to think that the person who carried the girder could gently drop it after the building was completed and just go away with a sweep of their robes.

But how was that possible?

The word 'power' had always been a dead end in times of danger, no two opposing parties could coexist.

Chapter 76: Centrifugal

*Note: For more accuracy, Military Office will now be referred to as Grand Council. The Grand Council (军机处; literally Office of Military Secrets, or Military and Political Affairs Office) was an important policy-making body during the Qing dynasty ^^*

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"Our side had dragged the court spinning around," Gu Yun whispered. "It is time to rest and recuperate."

—

A few days later, the news of the Western Region countries seeking truce came to the capital. After the Grand Council reported to Emperor Long An, discussing urgently for a day, they replied to the Marquis of Order. There were two things that needed to be ensured: first, let the traitors have no power to turn over in the next three to five years, to avoid inner conflict when dealing with the foreigners; second, demand Ziliujin, the more, the better. The danger of the treasury will be relieved temporarily, but the predicament of *Ziliujin* in Great Liang had not yet been released. All four fronts were encircled, the reason why they chose to act from the west first was because the Black Iron Camp was stationed here, on the other hand, it was because they hoped to solve the *Ziliujin* problem at the fastest speed.

Other major and minor matters were to be decided by the Marquis as he saw fit.

Yan Wang then entered the Palace to make a brief report on the war and the achievements of the Feng Huo ticket.

Li Feng calculated with his fingers and was almost shocked by how effective the tickets are. He couldn't help asking, “How come there are so much?"

"It is not surprising either. There are countless people in the court who are eager to give all their wealth. There is no reason for self-preservation at the critical moment. For better or worse, they had

provided some of their strength." Chang Geng first casually flattered him in no hurry and said, "As for the people, there is a saying that 'merchants purchase leather in summer, silk in winter, boats in a drought and carriage in a flood, waiting for the day where they could sell them for a profit'. People who can become a giant are not small businessmen who only chase small profits in front of their eyes."

Li Feng quietly pondered for a moment and asked, "According to you, what are they seeking from me?"

Chang Geng said without hesitation: "Businessmen are rich in wealth, but they also need to come and go in the wind and rain. To some extent, they are no better than the peasants who need to assess God's face to make a living. Sometimes a court decree can make their property collapse, or when meeting with bandits on their business trips, their lives and the lives of their families will not be guaranteed. Now the country is in trouble, the giants from the trading group came forward with Du Wan Quan, the richest man in Jiangnan as their head. On one hand, it is to serve the country, on the other hand, is it not to look for a place of support from Royal Brother?"

Li Feng had listened to many flatteries and was not so easily moved. He gazed at *Yan Wang*'s hidden meaning with a faint look.

Chang Geng did not let out the bait for too long either, he took advantage of the opportunity to press on: "At the moment, money is needed, the court also plans to issue a second batch of Feng Huo tickets. My brother, you see... should we give these head merchants a little appropriate profit in order to encourage more people to donate their money?"

Li Feng remained silent and looked at Chang Geng with an unusual expression.

Sometimes such things as 'sincerity' were only effective in a certain amount of time and would expire without waiting. For example, when the capital city was besieged, Emperor Long An was full of grief, anger, and guilt. He wished he could crash into the mausoleum of his predecessor, and his decision to pass the throne to Chang Geng was sincere.

But perhaps right now, as the situation was stabilizing, his point of view about Chang Geng that was slowly deflecting with each day was also very sincere.

Yan Wang Li Min was only in his early twenties. If he were to be placed in an ordinary family, he would still be a young man who had just begun to learn how to carry household matters. But in a short period of only six months, he had single-handedly eased the danger of Great Liang. At this time, as he was standing in the pavilion quietly, with extraordinary talents, maturity, and stability, it truly made one feel… indescribably envious.

Imagine a supreme ruler, who, just a few years after their accession to the throne, was met with two rebellions, causing irritation to pile up, creating a strange story of the 'The Northern Camp Rebellion', becoming a laughing stock for the world. Finally, the mountains and rivers were infected by the iron hooves of foreign countries, civilians being displaced everywhere... and all of this, after going through the lowest point, had begun to improve slowly after *Yan Wang* entered the palace and took control of the Grand Council — what would Li Feng feel inside?

How should historians evaluate this period of history after a hundred years?

Li Feng truly did not want to know at all.

Most importantly, Li Min — his fourth brother, was still so young.

Li Feng's heart was full of gloom, his attitude had also grown cold with him. He said lightly, "There is no place that is not part of the kingdom, they are the children of Great Liang, serving the country and the people. Even if it were to ruin their property, is it not a part of their duty? What other profit would they hope to seek from me? Would that not be the same as buying and selling positions? Where would dignity be!”

Chang Geng was very good at observing words and expressions, meeting Li Feng's eyes lightly. He immediately understood where the Emperor's unprovoked indifference came from. Although he was

sneering in his heart, his face was shocked and puzzled with no hint of pretense: "Royal..."

Li Feng interrupted him impatiently: "All right! How to reward the understanding righteous folk businessmen, return to the Ministry of Housing and the Ministry of Rites to work out a proper measure, only within the limit, we cannot award and spoil them too much."

Chang Geng put on a 'depressed' face for a while before reluctantly saying "Yes".

Li Feng looked at him and suddenly, seemed to had unintentionally or intentionally said, "The Ministry of Administration Wei Shu was already of old age. As it happened to rain last night, when he got up early and rushed to court, without paying attention, he had fallen and broke his leg in his home. He was already being seen by the doctor, it seemed to not be very good. His family had brought forth the retirement request to me ... in this way, the Minister of Administration will have to be vacant. You are in charge of the Grand Council, A Min, do you have someone to recommend?"

This sentence was a not so clever test, but not clever did not mean ineffective.

For a doubtful person like Li Feng, whether Chang Geng pushed his boat along the river flow, to recommend someone on his side to the position, or if he answered too carefully, both were not what Li Feng hoped to see. The former showed that he was too ambitious, and the latter showed that he was too preoccupied with calculations.

Chang Geng was stunned at first then instinctively blurted out, "What? Something had happened to Master Wei?"

He appeared as if he truly was unaware of this matter.

After blurting out this sentence, Chang Geng seemed to have 'just returned to his senses' and found himself answering the wrong questions. He frowned and pondered for a long time and sighed anxiously to Emperor Long An: "This... Royal Brother forgive me, Your subject had been running around for bits of gold and silver these days, I truly had no time to pay attention to anything else. I

may not have read the request of the Minister yet. This... the position of a Minister is very important, your subject momentarily could not think of any candidate…”

Li Feng suspected that he intended to stall: "It's alright, go on."

Chang Geng stretched out his hand and pressed his furrowed brows. He paused and answered, "In this way, isn't it better for Royal Brother to publicly appraise in the court, seeking the talented individual?"

Li Feng: "..."

The answer was really unexpected. Li Feng was frightened by *Yan Wang*'s unusual means of doing things and was almost led by him. He blurted out, "How should the evaluation be?"

"For example, the official's resume, his achievements, his merits over the years and so on are all recorded," Chang Geng paused, changing his voice. "It can also be added whether this person has the criteria of responsibility and righteousness, such as whether they had purchased the Feng Huo ticket or not. Speaking of this, Your subject suddenly was reminded of one thing: in the future, in order for the tickets to work smoothly, would Royal Brother include how much tickets one possessed in the evaluation criteria? This does not count as buying and selling positions, does it?”

Li Feng: "..."

Speaking for half a day, he was led back here again by this kid. Li Feng felt that if he prized off the beautiful head of *Yan Wang* at this time, the brain inside must have formed into the shape of a gold ingot.

Emperor Long An did not know whether to cry or laugh: "You... such outrageous words!"

Chang Geng could not afford to press on this time, he lowered his voice to apologize, his face dyed with a hint of sorrow unable to be concealed.

After a few sentences of conversation that did not quite meet, Li

Feng's gloomy doubts in his heart were already scattered for the most part, and it seemed that *Yan Wang*'s aim truly was not in the Minister of Administration.

"Either way," Li Feng thought, "It could be said that he had done his best."

Just as this thought came out, his attitude also eased up, he waved to Chang Geng and said, "Alright, you go back first to rest, let me think about it again."

Chang Geng answered, paid his courtesy and retreated, knowing in his heart that he had overcome this test.

However, just as he was about to exit the pavilion, Li Feng suddenly stopped him.

"Wait a minute, A Min, there's one more thing," Li Feng said with a gentle expression, speaking in the tone of discussing family matters: "Now you're no longer little, it is not good to be alone all the time. After all, it is time to start a family."

Chang Geng's heart jumped.

Li Feng said pleasantly, "The eldest granddaughter of Grand Scholar Fang is seventeen years old. She is waiting to be wed. I heard that this lady has long had a good name. She is a girl of a scholarly family, She must be well educated. Her origin would not be a disgrace to you either, it could be said that you both will make a good couple. Your elder sister-in-law heard about this, she would love to help you more or less take care of this matter. I took it upon myself to ask you this question. If you like it, Royal Brother will initiate for you, how about it?"

This marriage was not only good, but very good — although Fang Hong was a scholar who had been in office for many years, most of the important members of the court still wished to worship him as a teacher. He had three sons in total, each of whom had good foundations, one of them had just taken up the position of the Minister of Housing. Since the years of Yuan He, the noble families had somewhat considered the Fang family to be their lead.

Yet Chang Geng's expression turned unsightly in an instant.

Li Feng raised his eyebrows, asking: "What's the matter?"

Chang Geng lifted his robes and knelt down. His face was tense, but he said nothing.

Li Feng asked in surprise: “What are you doing?”

Chang Geng continued to kneel in silence.

No matter how friendly and caring Li Feng could be, he was also the Emperor. When he saw him like this, his face had also changed for the worse. "If there is any dislike about their lady, you can say it, you are *Yan Wang*, who would be able to force you to get married? Who are you displaying such an expression for?”

“Your subject does not want to," Chang Geng performed a grand courtesy, his voice also became different: "Elder sister-in-law is like a mother, Her Highness the Empress's care was wasted on me. My brother should punish me."

Li Feng frowned and said, "What is the reason? Did you hear that there is something not good about that lady, or did you have another person in your heart? There are no outsiders here, don't shy away from anyone, you can say it."

Chang Geng's eyes swept around the pavilion, stubbornly refusing to squeak, his eyes were slightly red.

Of course, Li Feng was not trying to find a good marriage for Chang Geng, he would never want to watch the Fang and *Yan Wang* become a family. Mentioning this matter with ingenuity, in truth, it was because he was not finished with his test, but he did not expect to arouse such a fierce emotion from *Yan Wang* either. At the moment, he had also become quite curious. He signaled for the servants inside to withdraw to the outside and await further command.

There were only the two brothers left in the Pavilion. Li Feng said, "Can you speak now?"

Chang Geng offered him a deep bow, but without saying a word, he slowly opened the collar of the court attire.

Li Feng was surprised, standing up abruptly: “This..."

The young *Yan Wang*'s chest was covered with old scars. The most striking and frightening one was a burnt wound, placed very close to his throat, it was quite thin, seeming to have been created by being whipped with a hot fire stick.

“Royal Brother, please forgive my impoliteness." Chang Geng whispered, his voice carried a tremor that was difficult to detect.

As the shock passed, Li Feng immediately came to a realization. After a moment of being puzzled, he softened his voice and asked: "Was it... the barbarian woman that time?"

Chang Geng’s complexion was pale, he slowly pulled his clothes together again.

The fingers that had drawn the bow and shot an arrow through the head of the Dong Ying's spy trembled violently. He lowered his eyes and whispered, "Although it is the behavior of a coward to disdain the world for one person's fault, but…”

He gritted his teeth, his voice breaking involuntarily, bowing to the ground: "Fang family’s lady is gracious and prestigious, deserving of someone who could be a life-long support. Your brother has strange temperament, I truly do not like to be close to another. The matter of marriage… Royal Brother, please never mention it again."

Li Feng said in astonishment, "What are you saying? You are a prince, how could there be such a thing as never getting married in your whole life?"

Chang Geng said expressionlessly, "Then Your Majesty might as well take back my royal status and let me wander the pugilist world with the monks?”

Li Feng: "..."

Although *Yan Wang* appeared bright, big-hearted,

knowledgeable, and reasonable, but in truth, he could have a lot of petty temper. Moreover, when throwing a fit, he did not cook up a storm either, he had but one sentence: "I am abandoning my duty, find whoever else as you please."

Li Feng was powerless with him, instantly growing furious and ordering *Yan Wang* to get out. Yan Wang did not say more either, immediately and obediently getting away.

A keen servant slowly ran up to him and asked, "Your Highness, do you want to go back to the Grand Council?"

Yan Wang did not necessarily go home for ten days to half a month. He almost lived in the Grand Council.

Chang Geng stopped for a moment, his focus scattered, seemingly standing in a daze in one place. The servant did not dare to disturb him, staying on one side silently.

"... No," Chang Geng whispered. "Go home."

The old scars on Chang Geng's body, even Gu Yun had never seen them, he thought it would be a period of time that could not be touched. But unexpectedly today, it had turned to be a tool for him to stall with Li Feng.

The carriage rumbled across the broad and all-rounded bluestone road of the capital. Chang Geng, who closed his eyes to rest, suddenly opened them.

One day, these things would come to a point of being irremediable.

Someday he would use any means, even more than he did now.

But he always felt his heart was not uncomfortable, because each step he took was his own decision, he had long thought about it carefully, there was no regret.

All the way back to the cold and quiet Marquis's manor, he did not disturb anyone, nor did he eat anything, going directly to Gu Yun's incomparably clean and simple bedroom to lie down, closed his

eyes, as if the light medicinal fragrance were still lingering on the blanket.

More than half a month later, after numerous wrangling arguments in the court, Emperor Long An finally rejected the absurd proposal of *Yan Wang* that the first people who bought the Feng Huo tickets should have official positions and ranks according to the amount of money they spent.

He only promised to the trading group that once the situation would be stable in the future, they would open commercial roads escorted by the military, to protect them from thieves and bandits. At this time, the people who bought the Feng Huo tickets could obtain the right to join. No fee was required to qualify for membership.

And more than a month later, a law shocking the government and the countryside came into effect from top to bottom — the Feng Huo ticket was declared an important indicator for the examination of officials.

The blade of a knife, which no one could see at this time, slowly formed into shape.

As soon as this decree came out, the whole world was shocked. The Great Liang court did not treat officials unfairly, salaries were not low. However, the human relations and expenses in the official circles were also high. Especially under Yuan He regency, the national power had been unprecedentedly strong under the iron blood of Emperor Wu, and the extravagant display had somewhat become a trend. At this time, officials were encouraged to buy Feng Huo tickets to reinforce their future.

Would this not be the same as encouraging corruption and fraud?

It had only been a few days, the frontier had caught wind of this.

"Zi Xi!" Shen Yi threw the reins into a personal guard’s hands and charged into the handsome tent. He was about to speak, but as he saw Gu Yun had a platinum glass mirror on his nose, he knew that he had not taken any medicine, He swallowed the following words

back.

Regarding Gu Yun recently, he did not know what had happened. As long as there was no need to see outsiders, he would take the medicine less and less, as if he intended to be a blind and deaf man with a peaceful state of mind.

Shen Yi raised his hand.

Gu Yun instantly said, "No need, you can say it, I also need to practice lip reading."

Shen Yi sighed: "... Have you heard about the reform of official administration?"

Gu Yun did know lip reading, but these years, he had been relying on drugs, people around him were also considerate of him and used sign language instead, thus he was not so familiar and have to slowly getting accustomed to it. It took a while for him to understand what Shen Yi meant, Gu Yun's eyebrows slowly wrinkled up, he slowly nodded.

"What is the matter with His Highness *Yan Wang*? Is he not afraid people will say he is a corrupted official? Even if we can solve the urgent problem for a while, what will we do in the future? Well-known families with money to spare is one thing, will the disciples and students in the country not want to pierce his backbone? You see, he was in charge of the Grand Council alone, already being a large tree easily catching the wind of jealousy, I really..."

Shen Yi's words were full of worries, as soon as he was worried, his mouth was as fast as a chicken pecking rice, causing Gu Yun to be dizzy looking at him. He could not able to 'listen' to more than half of the words, but he understood the last sentence.

Shen Yi: "How is he going to end this in the future?"

Gu Yun was silent.

Shen Yi: "Zi Xi, say something."

"No more fighting." Gu Yun made a completely off-base answer.

Shen Yi: "..."

He sighed heavily and suspected that Gu Yun had not ‘heard’ what he had said at all. He thought to himself, "*Practice lip language my ass, more like training my lip muscles*."

As Shen Yi was planning to change communication methods, Gu Yun spoke up : "I was a little too impatient and rushed in before, served me right being exploded by them. Fortunately, there is no real danger here, I have been thinking a lot these days... Jia Lai is not a bunch of scraps like those on the West side. I'm afraid there will be several fierce battles on that side. But as we are right now, we do not have enough money to serve as an inspiration — we need to make a more thorough discussion.”

Shen Yi was stunned: "You are planning to..."

"Our side had dragged the court spinning around," Gu Yun whispered. "It is time to rest and recuperate."

Chapter 77: Nightmare

—

"What are you doing in my bed?"

—

In the early summer of the eighth year of Long An, the Western Regions could no longer resist. They gathered the remnants of their army, opened the door of the country, and joined together to send a letter for surrendering to the parent country.

At the entrance of the Silk Road, the representatives of the Western Regions sat with Great Liang for the second time and were forced to negotiate.

For defeated generals, Gu Yun was too lazy to show up and only appointed Shen Yi as his sole representative.

Shen Yi came with the harsh requirements of Great Liang, the first was to ask for a large sum of gold and silver. Secondly, to build Great Liang garrisons in western countries to monitor the dependent countries. Starting from now, except Lou Lan who was an ally, other dependent countries were not allowed to have a single machine and steel armor, including Light Suit — all must be destroyed. Finally, Great Liang required that the dependent countries pay tribute of more than 70% of the *Ziliujin* each year to Great Liang.

Even Shen Yi felt his tooth ache when he read this passage for himself. It was like scraping bones. The representatives of various countries were crying for their ancestors.

When the first negotiation failed, Gu Yun attacked the surrendered Western Regions disabled barracks overnight with 300 Heavy Armor units the next day. Explosions painted the sky red. He artificially completed the main content of the second requirement of the contract for them, declared publicly that it was alright whether or not they agreed to the other two, and immediately led people to slaughter the city.

Slaughtering was harmful to heaven's good will. Generally, only the Northern Barbarians did this. There was seldom such a custom in the Great Liang Army. However, people in the Western Regions worried that Gu Yun despised them for the bombing, they suspected that he could do anything. At first, they remained stubborn. But when Gu Yun order people to open the gate, the representatives of the coalition forces on the negotiating table finally panicked.

After several bargainings failed, three days later, the ‘Lou Lan New Treaty’ was signed. Under the deterrence of Gu Yun's heavy forces, these countries first cleared out their war equipments at the fastest speed, then painfully gathered the *Ziliujin* that had not been used in a year after excavation.

At the end of May, Gu Yun and Shen Yi secretly escorted Ziliujin back to the capital from the Western Regions.

A heavy rain washed the streets and lanes of the capital, and fragmented locust blossoms fell all over the streets.

The reform of the official system was so popular that the chaos that everyone imagined would appear miraculously did not come.

First of all, noble families were not foolish. Even if they were dissatisfied with *Yan Wang*'s changing ways of digging money from their pockets, they knew that compared with themselves, the poor students, who came from imperial examinations and could not collect a few or two pieces of silver even if they search all over their bodies, hated this policy most. There was no way they would step forward for the sake of others. So at first, all these people hid and prepared to watch the play.

Unexpectedly, this was also truly strange, except for a few stubborn old Confucians who stood up and said a few words of ‘undignified’ or ‘disrespectful’ among other things, the water surface was peaceful, even a droplet did not turn up in the middle of the court.

Chang Geng first wrote a paper to persuade the Emperor and presented his longer-term vision of the Feng Huo ticket to Li Feng. He wrote everything from top to bottom in details, skillfully concealed

and exaggerated it at the same time.

Finally, he envisioned a large pie for the Emperor. In time — the Feng Huo ticket was carried out everywhere, which could collect all the people's gold and silver into the national treasury, selling and buying would be made by tickets only, and the amount of the tickets would be determined by the court as appropriate. There would no longer be a situation in which private gold and silver were collecting dust in the storage and the treasury had no money to use in times of national distress.

Before, Li Feng used to think that some ideas of *Yan Wang* were too deviant and disrespectful. He now found out that this man was not only disrespectful, but simply wanted to step on the word 'respect' under his feet.

In the past, there was Emperor Shi who took over the weapons of the country to cast a statue. Today, there was a *Yan Wang* who collected the world's wealth into one place.

However, this idea was too tempting. After understanding more of the concept of 'using several pieces of paper to replace gold and silver in buying and selling', Li Feng, on one hand, felt vaguely anxious, on the other hand, he was really unable to resist the temptation. He discounted the paper for three days of hesitation. Then he finally ordered Chang Geng to get started on it, but repeatedly warned that the means could not be too radical, especially for those rising young students who came from poor families, that he must 'take it slow'.

What Emperor Li Feng did not know was that, as early as when *Yan Wang* wrote a quest for a change of the official system, the richest man in Jiangnan came to the capital with thirteen giants from all over the country and invited the guests in the small restaurant where the Lin Yuan emblem chose its owner.

The small restaurant was shabby and obscure. In the past few years, it was covered by the glory of the old Qi Yuan Tower like a firefly under the moon, those with bad eyes would not be able to find it.

But this time, it was very lucky to have survived in the devastated capital city. At the beginning of the year, it took a rest and formally opened its doors to welcome visitors. Two floors were added to the original two-storey building. The shattered bricks and tiles were completely cleaned up and the name was changed to ‘Wangnan Tower*’, arousing the sorrow of half a country fallen into the hands of the enemy. It fit the scene very well. Few people knew that this half-dead restaurant was Du Wan Quan's property.

**Wangnan means 'looking towards the South'. As one might recall, Jiangnan which is in the South is occupied by the Westerners.*

The first negotiation between the two sides had been very frustrating. The scholars were self-reserved and noble. They had been in the officials scene for many years. They were unwilling to deal with these people smelling of money, they mostly came only for perfunctory entertainment.

Who knew that after interacting, only then they realized Du Wan Quan was not a simple man.

Du Wan Quan had personally sailed to the Western Ocean and seen the real world. His character, thoughts, and way of talking was different from ordinary businessmen. His sharp tongue could bring the dead back to life. Together with Jiang Chong's calm management, many people would soon have a change of mind.

Waiting until the new official administration system had slowly soaked in, Du Wan Quan and his colleagues visited the largest private room in Wangnan Tower, treating eight important ministers of the court headed by Jiang Chong to a second banquet. All of them were without support in the court, became an official through the imperial examination, and started from scratch.

This talk lasted for more than four hours. After the moon hung high in the sky, Jiang Chong who was serving as the head finally raised his cup to end the session.

Jiang Chong rose and looked around. Many people drank too much.

"We are full for today, everyone is tired, I will not ruin the mood. With this cup of wine, let's drink and dismiss." Jiang Chong said, "As long as we have to fight this battle, the implementation of the Feng Huo ticket is something that will happen sooner or later, you gentlemen are dedicated to the country..."

As Jiang Chong said this, he left the other half of the sentence empty, silently drinking the cup of wine. The next part, everyone here could already understand inside.

Dedicated to the country, but please also consider your own way out.

Over the years, there had been no way for the major merchants to have their input in court matters, the businessmen who were eager to have their own spokesperson had formally formed an alliance with a group of powerless and pure civil officials.

Du Wan Quan sent a room full of civil servants and businessmen away one by one, then returned to Wangnan Tower alone. He came to the private room right next to the one from just now. There were no servants inside, and the lights were not lit. There was only a dim steam lamp hanging over head. There were two taels* of yellow wine, a bowl of porridge and a dish of vegetables on the table. Half a bowl of porridge was already drunk, and three parts of wine remained. The dishes were only touched slightly but the chopsticks were already put aside.

**an ancient unit of measurement*

Du Wan Qian no longer possessed the exquisite appearance from just now, respectfully went to pay courtesy: "Your Highness *Yan Wang*."

Chang Geng nodded politely: "Master Du."

Du Wan Quan glanced over the watery porridge and dishes on the table, he hurriedly said, "I admire the fact that Your Highness usually prefer saving, but this Wangnan Tower is our own property. Why don't we order some delicious cuisine? Summer is coming, I'll let them prepare some refreshing dishes good for health."

"There's no need, eating this is enough," Chang Geng waved his hand and said, "Today's business depends entirely on Master Du, I have troubled you."

Du Wan Quan quickly said he did not dare to. When seeing that Chang Geng got up to leave, he graciously lifted the umbrella on the side: "The carriage is ready in the backyard. Your Highness please come this way."

If at the beginning, the most reluctant person when Liao Ran summoned the Lin Yuan emblem was undoubtedly Du Wan Quan, who made his fortune in his early years by relying on the power of Lin Yuan Pavilion, but earning this family business, there was no way Du Wan Quan could admit how helpful Lin Yuan Pavilion was. At that time, he was asked to devote all his life's works to a person he had never met with before, anyone would naturally refuse.

But after half a year of being with *Yan Wang*, the one who undoubtedly wished to serve him the most was also Du Wan Quan.

Du 'God of Wealth' had traveled through south and north for many years, his knowledge and experience was higher than that of ordinary people. He could vaguely feel that Chang Geng was indeed saving the country out of danger, but even more than that, it seemed he was paving the way for something.

Du Wan Quan had an unspeakable excitement: the windy and stormy road of Great Liang rose to prosperity from Emperor Wu's reign, reaching its peak then declined in Emperor Yuan He's rule, and came to the end of the road under Emperor Long An. Right now, it truly was about to enter a new turning point.

And he was able to board this boat simply from one wooden emblem.

Chang Geng had just come to the door when he accidentally touched his waist, his footsteps came to a halt.

Du Wan Qian keenly caught this and asked, "What is Your Highness looking for?"

"Nothing," Chang Geng said, seemingly absent-minded. "The fragrance has run out."

These days, he must pay attention to all fronts. The tranquilizer was consumed too fast, he hasn't had time to created a new patch. Chang Geng sighed and laughed at Du Wan Quan. "It's alright Master Du, There is no need to see me off, please send a message to Master Feng Han. The thing he had always hoped for, will be able to come true one day."

His tolerance of alcohol was not very good — with the status of a prince, usually no matter what occasion, no fool would have the courage to get him drunk, although because of his natural self-control, Chang Geng had never been completely drunk, but judging from the headache that arose from only two to three cups, perhaps his tolerance might not be very good indeed.

Chang Geng usually did not touch even a drop of wine, but today, as he had been eavesdropping for more than four hours, he was truly too exhausted, let people brought up two taels of rice wine to stimulate a bit. Who knew that this bit of alcohol was not only not helpful to sleep, but also made it difficult for him to fall asleep at night.

Chang Geng tossed and turned in bed for a long time, but only until it was almost the fourth period did he drift off. Half asleep and half awake, he seemed to hear someone enter the door. He turned over and woke up, raised his hand and turned on the small steam lamp hanging from the bed. He wondered whether it was due to the humid and rainy weather in the capital these days or whether nobody had lived in the room for some time, as the result the steam lamp flashed then went out again.

The visitor sat on one side of the bed and laughed, "What are you doing in my bed?"

Chang Geng was surprised. His eyes were used to the darkness. With a little light, he saw that Gu Yun had returned. He asked hurriedly, "Didn't you say it would take two more days to return to the capital? How did you arrive so soon?"

Gu Yun casually stretched out his waist and leaned aside. "I missed you. I urged my horse to come back first."

Last time they bid farewell, it was the New Year. Winter came to spring in a blink of an eye. Now it was already summer, they had not seen each other for half a year. Although Gu Yun often placed 'private goods' in his war reports and sent letters every other time, but how could ink and paper compare with the real person in the flesh?

Chang Geng missed him incredibly, he rushed up wanting to hug him.

Gu Yun, however, leaned back and lightly dodged his hand. He fell like a piece of paper to the window. The rain had stopped outside. The moonlight pouring quietly from the puddles into the room. Gu Yun stood with his back towards the light. Chang Geng saw he was wearing Light Armor that had not been taken off for thousands of years.

"Why did you get touchy with your hands the moment we met?" Gu Yun said, "I am only here to visit you."

Chang Geng did not know whether to cry or laugh at the first half of the sentence. The wicked man had complained first, who was the one with touchy hands? But when he heard the second half of the sentence, his smile suddenly subsided, he could vaguely feel something was wrong: "Zi Xi, what's the matter?"

Gu Yun kept silent, only looked at him.

Two people — one standing, one sitting — relatively watching each other in silence for a while, yet it seemed like a farewell with no future reunion.

Chang Geng's heart jumped wildly for no reason, so much that his chest could hardly contain anything else, even breathing could not be done. He could not bear it any longer, climbing up and going to Gu Yun, from the bedside to the small window, there was but four or five steps away, yet he seemed to be unable to reach it.

As soon as he moved forward a little, Gu Yun took a step back.

Turning around and grabbing the steam lamp at the bedside, Chang Geng frantically twisted it. The steam lamp made several loud sparkling noises. Suddenly, the room was blazing. Chang Geng turned to Gu Yun anxiously, regardless of the bright light.

However, he saw the face of the man standing by the window was as white as paper, with grey hue of someone who was already dead, two lines of blood streamed down the corners of his mouth and the beauty mark under his eye.

The steam lamp went out again.

Gu Yun gave a low sigh: "I cannot be in the light. What are you turning it for? Chang Geng, I am leaving now."

What does 'cannot be in the light' mean? Chang Geng almost went mad on the spot. He rushed up and grabbed hold of him desperately, but only caught a cold, piercing armor.

Chang Geng shouted with a hoarse voice: "Stop, where do you want to go? Gu Zi Xi!"

"Where I must go." Gu Yun's voice brought a little coldness. "Now all your wings have grown, deceiving Lin Yuan Pavilion, to seize the nation of Li family. Every talented individual in the world are restrained in your hands. How extraordinary are your schemes? Li Feng will die in your hands, will he not? It's no use for me to remain for longer. I am here to say goodbye."

Chang Geng said in a panic, "No, wait, I did not..."

He intuitively wanted to refute that he was not such a person, but as the words came to his lips, he could not let them out. In confusion, he felt that he had indeed done what Gu Yun had said.

Gu Yun said coldly, "I was entrusted by the former Emperor to take you back from Yanhui town and take care of you until adulthood. Even if you will not become a pillar of the world, I had at least hoped for you to be a person with good personality, noble and righteous. Yet what have you done?"

In the early summer night, Chang Geng suddenly felt the unprecedented cold.

"I took care of you until you grew up according to the wishes of my ancestor, but I did not realize that it was a Zhongshan* wolf that I have raised." Gu Yun sighed, "It has been two hundred years since the founding of Great Liang by emperor Tai Zu. I thought it could last for thousands of generations. Who knew that the Jade Seal of the Nation was destroyed in our generation..."

**this term was used to refer to someone to betray those that had aided them.*

Chang Geng wanted to strongly grab him, or to cry out loudly. However, his whole body seemed to had been fixed in place, he could only look at Gu Yun as he lightly turned around and dropped a sentence: “This Gu will now go to the underworld to beg for forgiveness, there is no need for the two of us to see one another again.”

He then walked through the wall and disappeared into the void. The open window was empty. Chang Geng’s organs were burned up. He woke up with a loud cry. His heart beat like thunder. Slowly exhaling the accumulating breath inside, only then did he recover and realized that it was only a nightmare as vivid as reality.

He did not know whether it was because of the alcohol or something else. His head ached in waves, his limbs were exhausted, he was even more tired after a night's sleep.

After a moment, Chang Geng forced himself to calm down, he was planning to get up and drink some water, then close his eyes to rest for a while. Unexpectedly, just as he had lifted himself up, he suddenly saw a dark shadow on the wooden chair by the window. The visitor was breathing very softly, it was obvious the other was an expert, causing Chang Geng, due to the noise of his heartbeat, to be unable to notice it for a moment.

He instinctively shouted, "Who is it?"

The man laughed low and said, "What are you doing in my bed?"

Nothing was more frightening than this. Chang Geng had not fully awakened from his nightmare. His elbows instantly went soft, falling directly back to the bed. Gu Yun's old bed was hard everywhere from the board to the pillow. This collision was no small matter. The careful and calm *Yan Wang* was almost knocked unconscious by a pillow.

Gu Yun was shocked, quickly rushing to the bedside to help him up.

He left Shen Yi and the group of personal guards behind to rush back two days earlier. He planned to take a rest for a night then go give Chang Geng a scare tomorrow morning. Who knew that as he came in, he found that the bed was already occupied by someone. He knew from Miss Chen that Chang Geng did not rest well. It was difficult to fall asleep, and even after he fell asleep, he was easily disturbed, thus he did not have the heart to wake him up.

"Where did you hit yourself? Oh no, Let me see," Gu Yun said unknowingly, "Although your behavior of a dove occupying a magpie's nest is very bad, but I haven't said anything yet. Why are you acting like you have seen a ghost? Confess, what good deeds have you done behind my back?"

Chang Geng seized his wrist with a trembling hand. This time, what he grasped onto was the warm body temperature of a person, it had calmed him down a bit.

Gu Yun found that Chang Geng's mood was a little unstable, he intended to ease the atmosphere with a little chatter, "Why didn't you ask why I came back two days sooner?

Chang Geng's face changed.

Gu Yun's crow mouth continued to say, "I missed you. I had urged my horse..."

Chang Geng cried out sharply, "Don't say anymore!"

His voice was too miserable, Gu Yun paused, then asked carefully, "Chang Geng, what's wrong?"

As he spoke, he searched for the steam lamp at the end of the bed.

But unexpectedly, with such a gentle twist, the steam lamp sparked two times in disorder, then there was silence. It had broken completely.

In an instant, reality and nightmare overlapped by an incredible coincidence. Chang Geng let out a hoarse, low-pitched scream. The vague pain of his limbs flooded into his heart like rising tides, turning into a hundred and eighty thousand dreadful illusions, opening its enormous bloodsoaked mouth and swallowing him in one gulp.

Chapter 78: Worry and Fear

___

Zi Xi, as long as you say a word, even a sea of flame or a mountain of swords, I will still charge ahead.

___

In truth, Gu Yun had witnessed the attack of Bone of Impurity before, but at that time he was still kept in the dark. It so happened that Chang Geng's condition at that time was not very serious, hence he had always mistaken it as training gone wrong. He had never met with such a scene before.

Chang Geng huddled up, his muscles became as tight as iron, and he soon trembled violently, as if he was enduring great pain. Moreover, he also possessed astonishing strength, Gu Yun's hand slipped and was not able to hold him back.

Chang Geng threw off his hand fiercely. His fingers were like eagle's claws, strongly scratching at his own arms. Gu Yun certainly could not bear to watch him hurting himself. He reached out and grabbed his arm, "Chang Geng!"

His voice seemed to have brought a glimmer of clarity to Chang Geng, but it could only stop him for a moment.

The steam lamp hanging at the head of the bed, in the key moment, went off after a 'creaking' sound, then finally and slowly lit up again. The light was dim and unstable, illuminating Chang Geng's pair of blood-red eyes.

Gu Yun was shocked to find that Chang Geng's face and lips were pale, as if the blood in his entire body had concentrated into those eyes, but in the originally ordinary eyes vaguely showed a double pupils.

Truly resembling the statue of the legendary evil god.

When Gu Yun listened to Miss Chen talking about 'Wu Er Gu', at that

time, he felt only heartache. There were certain details he was not able to believe in due to the inability to imagine them. Up until now. A cool air climbed up his spine, the pair of eyes with no emotion but with raging bloodshed had caused the seasoned general to feel cold all over.

The two watched one another. Gu Yun suddenly had the illusion of encountering feral animals in the wilderness. For a moment, he dared not avert his sight, slowly spreading out his empty hand and tried to reach Chang Geng. Chang Geng did not hide. Even in the moment when the warm palm touched his face, he even lowered his head slightly and indifferently rubbed his cheek against his hand.

Gu Yun asked in a low, frightened voice, "Do you still know who I am?"

Chang Geng lowered the eyelashes thicker than those of the ordinary Central Plains person, giving a low cry: "... Zi Xi."

It was good that he could still recognize those he knew. Gu Yun was too relieved to notice the unusual tone of his voice. But he was relieved too early. Not waiting for him to breathe out, Chang Geng suddenly and unexpectedly reached out a hand, wanting to choke him: "Not letting you go!"

Gu Yun: "..."

The throat was a critical point of the body. Gu Yun instinctively leaned back and pressed back the cold hand. Chang Geng grabbed his wrist towards him and ruthlessly twisted. Gu Yun had to bend his fingers and tap the numbing vein between his elbows.

In a very narrow space, the two of them exchanged several moves. That madman was already skilled in martial arts. At this time, with the evil god's infinite strength as the support, striking left and right at full force, Gu Yun was afraid of accidentally hurting him, breaking out in a sweat. He angrily scolded while panting: "Damn it, I just came back, where would I go?"

When Chang Geng came to a halt, the hand on the side of his neck loosened accordingly, he lightly slapped him on the chin with the

back of his hand: "Wake up!"

This tap might not have enough strength. Not only did it not wake him up, Chang Geng's eyes that seemed to be dripping blood suddenly squinted, then, like an enraged young leopard, he turned around and bit Gu Yun's arm.

Gu Yun: "..."

If he knew this would happen, he should have simply given him a slap to remember!

Gu Yun hissed, the corners of his eyes fiercely jumped. In this life, he had been chopped, bombed, but to be hated to the point of being swallowed alive and bitten, it was still the first time. He truly wanted to slap this madman's several front teeth off.

However, as his arm stayed stiff for a long time, finally, he was not able to do so. A moment later, Gu Yun slowly relaxed the muscles on his arm. He caressed the back of Chang Geng's neck and whispered, "Skinned and eaten, how much hatred is there between us? Do you despise me this much?"

This remark seemed to have touched Chang Geng's nerve. His eyes blinked slightly, then two lines of tears came down without warning.

Chang Geng did not make a sound, only biting Gu Yun's arm and quietly shed tears, the tears seemed to dilute the terrifying aura of bloodshed in his eyes. For a long time, Chang Geng's teeth were slightly loosened. Gu Yun tried to pull out his bloody arm, glancing at it, he scolded, "You bastard with the spirit of a dog!"

Even as he scolded, he still pulled the other into his arms, stretched out his hand to wipe away the tear marks on Chang Geng's eyes, and patted him on the back again and again.

Chang Geng lied on his chest, it took him half an hour to recover his mind gradually from the chaos. His whole expression seemed to have just awakened from a long dream. He was at a loss for a while, only now did the mess of memories gradually come back.

When he recalled what he had just done, Chang Geng's hairs all stood

up. He originally resembled a mass of mud, now he suddenly went stiff. Gu Yun knew that he had returned to normal.

"Awake?" Gu Yun lifted his Chang Geng's shoulder under the pretense of calmness, moving his own stiffened shoulders slightly, he reached out his hand and asked, "How many?"

Chang Geng's heart was an entangled mess, he did not dare to look at him at all. As he looked down at Gu Yun's scabbed arm, his expression turned even more unsightly. Holding it up with both hands, his lips trembled, unable to speak.

"Ah, bitten by a dog." Gu Yun looked at it carelessly, then took the opportunity to insult, "This dog's teeth are quite even."

Chang Geng slightly staggered to get up, found a fine silk cloth and clean water, bowed his head and wiped his wounds. His body seemed to have just been ravaged, even his soul was not present, appearing indescribably miserable.

But for Gu Yun, a man with a naturally excessive desire to protect others, not counting affection, judging by what met the eyes, he was most likely to be moved by 'fragility', even beauty had to come second. Witnessing this scene, his eyes softened down. He used five fingers to gently tidy up Chang Geng's long and tangled hair from the struggle just now.

"Last autumn, I went to the Central Plains with Ji Ping. We met with a group of bandit taking advantage of the people in the name of uprising," Gu Yun said slowly, in a tone even softer than the movement of his hands. "We worked with Old Cai to clean up the scourge and catch the bandits. The bandit leader called himself 'Huo Long', his body full of scars. During the interrogation, a blade of a barbarian woman was found on him... It was Hu Ge Er's."

Chang Geng's hand trembled fiercely, the silk cloth fell down. He bent to pick it up in a daze, but Gu Yun caught his hand.

Gu Yun gently asked: "You can remember it even at such a young age?"

Chang Geng's hand was as cold as a dead man.

Gu Yun sighed: "In fact, Miss Chen had told me all about it, about the..."

Chang Geng cut in, "Don't say anymore."

Gu Yun obediently closed his mouth and looked at him silently on the side.

Chang Geng sat stiffly for a moment, his actions suddenly turned fluent, smoothly taking care of the bitten wound, then suddenly stood up with his back towards Gu Yun: "Yan Wang Manor has been built for several years, it has been neglected, that is not appropriate. I... I will go back to the Grand Council early tomorrow morning, after this busy period of time had passed, I will move to..."

Gu Yun's face sank.

When Chang Geng's speech of no proper start or finish came to this point, he suddenly stopped talking. He couldn't help recalling Gu Yun's caring attitude when he went to the Northwest to reward the army at the end of the year - did it mean everything was because he knew the truth about the Bone of Impurity? He only pitied him?

Speaking of being unreasonable, Chang Geng could display old scars in front of Li Feng without restraint, but he did not want Gu Yun to see even a little bit of them.

Unexpectedly, even if he thought he had covered them tightly, the wind could still penetrate through the gap between the fingers. Chang Geng clenched his teeth tightly and could feel the blood in his mouth when he went mad.

Fishy yet sweet.

Since receiving Gu Yun's letter to return to the capital for reporting, he had been looking forward to it day and night, watching time flow by every moment was like torture. However, after waiting for the man to arrive, Chang Geng wished nothing more than to escape Gu Yun's sight immediately.

His mind was screaming inside, wanting to escape unconsciously. He turned and rushed out.

Gu Yun: "Stop, where are you going?"

Chang Geng was in a haze, ignoring him.

Gu Yun suddenly gave a low shout: "Li Min!"

From childhood to adulthood, Gu Yun had neither used heavy words towards him nor gotten angry at him. Nevertheless, in the army, Gu Yun never spoke twice. With high authority, such a slight angry shout resembled an absolute order. Chang Geng instinctively stopped.

Gu Yun sat beside the bed with a grave expression: "Get back here for me."

Chang Geng was puzzled, "I..."

"If you walk out of this door today," Gu Yun coldly warned, "I will break your leg. Even the Emperor can't save you. Come back, do not let me say it for the third time!"

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun was the first person who dared to say he would break his leg after Yan Wang commanded the Grand Council. Chang Geng was confused by his sudden outburst, momentarily not daring to walk out. He gathered up all his courage to look back at Gu Yun. All kinds of grievances and pains that were difficult to express in words poured into his heart.

... But there were still remnant of tears on his face. He had fully awakened, there truly was no more strength to cry.

Gu Yun could not stand such eyes of his. He had to compromise and stood up, pulling Chang Geng in his arms from behind. He somewhat forcefully threw him on the bed and pulled the cold blanket over him. "Why haven't you told me after so many years?"

Chang Geng took a deep breath and whispered, "... I'm afraid. "

What were you afraid of?

Gu Yun was shocked, then raising Chang Geng's face with one hand: "Who are you afraid of? Me? "

Chang Geng looked at him deep in the eyes. This gaze made Gu Yun understand what was called 'fearing because of love'.

Gu Yun wanted to ask, "What are you afraid of with me? Afraid that I will hate you? Suspect you?" But he swallowed these words down after they reached his lips.

Not knowing what to say, he acted, grabbing Chang Geng's collar and kissed him deep and hard. Chang Geng's breathing suddenly became heavy.

Gu Yun placed his hands beside his ears and raised his eyebrows. "Are you still afraid now?"

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun looked down at him from above, suddenly feeling his heart heat up. He licked his lips, planning to be improper to the end. He stretched his hand into Chang Geng's disheveled clothing.

Unexpectedly, just then, there was a sudden knock on the door outside, ruining the moment, and a despicable man named Huo called out unknowingly, "Your Highness, it is almost time to go to court, do you need to change clothes?"

Gu Yun: "..."

It turned out that after wrestling for a while, the sky had already dawned.

Huo Dan knocked at the door, but nobody answered. He thought Chang Geng was tired and did not hear him. He was about to knock again when suddenly the door was opened from inside. When Commander Huo saw the person coming out, he was shocked, "Mar-Marquis!"

When did their Marshal Gu come back? How did he get in without

alerting any of the family guards?

Jump over the wall?!

In the room, Chang Geng who was a little embarrassed, while tidying up his miserable appearance, he answered, "I will go now..."

Gu Yun interrupted him without a care, "Go and request a sick leave for His Highness. He won't go today."

Huo Dan was startled, he asked, "That... do we need a doctor?"

"Doctor? All doctors are a bunch of good for nothing." Gu Yun threw out the sentence angrily and immediately turned back inside the room, he ordered, "If there isn't anything, don't come to bother. Go quickly."

Huo Dan: "..."

Chang Geng who was put under house arrest looked helplessly at Gu Yun who arbitrarily made the decision: "I am not ill."

"You are not ill, am I ill?" Gu Yun brought out a handful of tranquilizer and put them into the fragrance burner on the side to light up. Things had already come to this, there was no need to hide any longer: "This is what Miss Chen asked me to bring back to you."

A refreshing fragrance permeated the room, Chang Geng sniffed it gently: "Miss Chen has changed her formula?"

Gu Yun rubbed the teeth mark on his arm: "Specialized in treating the little madman who bites people."

The tranquilizing fragrance soon took effect, filling the lungs, making one felt sluggish. Unable to muster any strength or rage, Chang Geng leaned tiredly on the bedside, letting his gaze roam free, staring at Gu Yun in a daze. His face was haggard, his hair was scattered, and his confused eyes were always on him. He appeared quite ill. There was not a single telling hint that he possessed an 'iron tooth'.

Chang Geng muttered, "Zi Xi, can I hold you?"

Gu Yun thought: *How clingy.*

Even so, he went over and sat next to him, letting him reluctantly lean over and put his arms around his waist.

"Call in sick." For a long time, Gu Yun suddenly said, "Isn't there a Grand Council already? Jiang Han Shi is also competent, he only lacked a few opportunities before. This time, he unexpectedly got recommended, presumably he will be able to compete for a chance, to show his talents for all to see."

"The *Ziliujin* tribute from the Western Regions has almost arrived in the capital, we can take a solid rest for a year or two. The Barbarians do not know how produce and do business, we can afford to delay, but Jia Lai Ying Huo cannot afford to be delayed. The Northern War situation will change after a long period of time, leaving only Jiangnan... After all, foreigners came thousands of miles across the sea, costing them many resources. Strong dragons cannot overwhelm the local snakes. Don't we have an upper hand compared to them?"

Chang Geng laid in his arms and slightly closed his eyes. Gu Yun's callus-covered fingers unconsciously shifted between his head and neck, making his scalp feel both itchy and numb.

"The reform of the official management has just begun," Gu Yun whispered. "Although you initiated this matter, I do not think the ministers reacted that strongly, basically they all had an acquiescent attitude towards it. If you quit at this time, whether it be contributions or errors, they are all in the hands of others. If we will not strive for merits, we will not make mistakes either... Whatever happens, you and I both return home and rest for a few years, alright?"

Shen Yi spoke a thousand words, but Gu Yun could only hear one sentence to heart, "How will it end in the future?"

Gu family had been feudal for generations and was also the relative of royalty. He had seen many ups and downs of the noble and officials. He also understood the fate of powerful generals to heart. Even if they were descendants of nobility, standing out too much, would they be able to avoid the current person in power or the pen of

judgment of the later generations?

"There is no way out," Chang Geng whispered after a while. "The first blade of the reform of official administration has slashed down, which is an equivalent to scraping down to the bones to cure the poisons. The skin and flesh have been cut open... At this time, to back away, is it to let one's skin open and wait, or to sew it back together again?"

The reform of official administration was only the first step. If only regarded as a means to carry out the *Feng Huo* ticket, the reform would fail to advance. There would be a situation in which everyone would compete for the *Feng Huo* ticket. At that time, corruption would prevail. If there were no upright individuals who knew how to control it, perhaps the *Feng Huo* ticket would end up being worthless and Great Liang will meet its end faster.

Gu Yun tightened his hold on him. When Chang Geng opened his eyes again, the bloodish hue and double pupils in his eyes had faded. Suddenly, he turned over, his movement was somewhat clumsy, pressing the person he missed day and night on the soft and thin quilt. "Zi Xi, do you know what the Bone of Impurity is?"

Gu Yun was surprised.

"The Bone of Impurity is a kind of evil god and the oldest curse of barbarians. When their whole clan is destroyed, they will leave behind a pair of children and make them into the Bone of Impurity. In this way, the refined person will have unparalleled strength in the world, bringing bloody storms and ending the lives of their mortal enemies, no matter how powerful they could be."

Chang Geng laid on him, there was a slight tremor in his chest as he spoke, but his voice was as warm and gentle as ever, only with a little unspeakable hoarseness to it. "Before her death, Hu Ge Er had said to me, all my life, I will have only hatred, tyranny, and suspicion in my heart, I will be violent and homicidal. Everywhere I go, there shall be a storm of blood, I am doomed to drag everyone to a horrible death, no one will love me, no one will treat me with sincerity."

Gu Yun was frightened. He used to think that when Chang Geng was

a teenager, his mind was too heavy with thoughts. There were innumerable twists and turns in it, making outsiders confused. But he did not know that behind those innumerable twists and turns, he was being weighed down with such a critical remark.

"But someone does love me, someone does treat me sincerely... Is that right? It was you had called me back just now." Chang Geng whispered, "She had never given me warmth for even a day, and I will never become what she had wished for me. Do you believe me? Zi Xi, as long as you say a word, even a sea of flame or a mountain of swords, I will still charge ahead."

Chapter 79: Heart to Heart

—

...heaven and earth had disappeared, no longer caring about anything else.

—

He was the prestigious *Yan Wang*, commanding the Grand Council, but whenever he was jolted awake from the nightmare that Xiu Niang had branded into his bone marrow, the one whom he could trust in and yearn for, in the end, was only one Gu Yun.

A person's weight was too heavy when pressed upon him, sometimes, he found that he was unable to carry it.

Master Liao Ran once said to him, "A person's pain lies in the inability to let go. The more you hold onto, the fuller your hands will become, the harder it will be to walk on." Chang Geng felt this sentiment deeply and admitted that the monk was right. But for him, even though Gu Yun was heavier than thousands of tons, he still could not put it down - because if he let this person go, his hands would be empty.

If a person lived on without any burden in their heart, would they not become a fraudulent flag to be blown by the wind?

Gu Yun raised his hand to his shoulder and tapped gently on the place of his shoulder and neck. Chang Geng was in pain, but he continued to watch him carefully, not avoiding.

Gu Yun asked: "Why would I make you walk in the sea of flame and a mountain of swords?"

"I wish one day the country will be prosperous, the people will have jobs to do, the whole world will be stable, and my general will not have to defend the frontier gates with his life. I want to be like Master Feng Han, fighting to untie the knot between imperial power and Ziliujin. I hope that all the machines running on the ground will be in the fields, that the flying Kites in the sky are filled with

ordinary travelers who take their families home to visit their relatives... Everyone can live with dignity." Chang Geng held his hand tightly, intertwining his five fingers with Gu Yun's own, wrapped together intimately.

Gu Yun was puzzled. This was the first time Chang Geng confessed his inner thoughts to him, causing him to somewhat be unable to control his heart firing up.

It's a pity that after thinking about it carefully, either way, it all sounded impossible.

"I can do it, Zi Xi, let me try." Chang Geng whispered.

Since he already possessed the power of the 'evil god', couldn't he try to tear through the bloodstained ways of the world, opening up a path never before seen for a mortal?

That year in Yanhui town, the teenager of thirteen or fourteen years old had once expressed his vision of not wanting to live a life wasted to the young general. Gu Yun, who was still frivolous at that time, threw a basin of cold water on his face and told him indifferently that ‘all heroes have no good end’.

Now, after several encounters in the desert of golden sand, having gone back and forth between the Palace and the Imperial Prison, General Gu himself had truly experienced what was called ‘heroes have no good end’, but he could not find the heart to say the same thing again to Chang Geng any more.

Using himself to measure others, if someone pointed to his nose and said to him, "Gu Yun, quickly roll back to the manor to retire. You are lucky to be able to live until now. Not withdrawing, you will sooner or later end up dead without a place to be buried."

What would he think?

Nowadays, in this world, one foot was in cold water and one foot in the mud, the person stuck inside would inevitably have difficulty in walking among them. Walking for a long time, from inside to outside would become cold, there was only the heart that would

bleed fiery spirit. Keeping on a path while knowing full well that it's impossible was not easy. If someone else... especially close relatives, who would also pour cold water as a hindrance, wasn't it too pitiful?

He kept silent for a long time. When Chang Geng was feeling some insensible tension, Gu Yun suddenly opened his mouth and said, "Had already kissed, already hugged, what else do you want me to say? Men talking too much will have no time to do other things, do you understand?"

Chang Geng was stunned, but Gu Yun already reached out a finger towards the half-dead steam lamp at the head of the bed, immediately turning it off. The day was not yet dawn, the room went dark. The bed curtain, which was usually hung up, fell down as if it could cover the sky and earth, blown slightly by the cool morning wind penetrating through a window.

Chang Geng was not able to respond but his waist was already loosened, not knowing when his belt was pulled away. Before he could recover from the oath of 'sea of flame and mountain of swords', his face instantly blushed red.

"Zi, Zi Xi…"

Gu Yun casually made a sound in response, impatiently throwing the silk cloth off his hand, idly leaning on the soft pile of blanket, his fingertips caressing across the hem of Chang Geng's clothing: "That time at the hot spring, you said you think of doing certain things that were out of the norm with me...what was it that you think of?"

Chang Geng: "..."

"Aren't you very good at talking?" Gu Yun said with a low laugh, "Let's hear it."

Chang Geng had never seen this kind of flirting that was teasing at the same time, his tongue tied in a knot: "I... I... "

"On this matter, you can't just simply think about it." Gu Yun caressed Chang Geng's waist through a layer of his clothes, touching at the root of his thighs not too hard yet not too light. Chang Geng

almost jumped up, unable to breathe, grabbing Gu Yun's vile hand running rampant everywhere, a fire burning from his stomach to his throat. He felt that he was going to burn into ashes.

Gu Yun had pushed open the hem of his clothing.

When his chest felt cold, Chang Geng suddenly realized it. He pressed Gu Yun's hand back, but it was too late. Large and small scars under his chest and neck were suddenly uncovered. When touched by the callused fingers, there was no need to mention how it would feel. On one hand, Chang Geng could not help but avoid it, on the other hand, his mouth was dry and his ears were buzzing, wondering whether he should advance or retreat.

Gu Yun had been traveling for days, then waited for the entire night at the bedside. The last bit of effectiveness of the medicine unfortunately worn off at this moment, his vision became blurred. However, the atmosphere was great, and he could not put on the liuli glass. Wearing it was just like a Mechanic preparing to take apart the steel armor, destroying the mood.

At this time, he relied solely on the touch of his hands and skimmed over the bumpy scars on Chang Geng's body. It was more painful than seeing them with his own eyes.

Gu Yun: "Did it hurt?"

Chang Geng lowered his head and looked at him deeply. He answered the wrong question, "They are already scarring for a long time."

Gu Yun's heart was filled with all kinds of emotions for a moment, even the surging desire subsided. He narrowed his gradually blurred eyes and rubbed his fingers carefully on the scars. Chang Geng truly could not bear it. He sobbed softly and clasped Gu Yun's wrist.

"Don’t be afraid," Gu Yun coaxed, "Let me love you."

If this half-blind could see Chang Geng’s expression, he would probably not say the words ‘don’t be afraid’.

Chang Geng bent down to kiss him. Gu Yun was kissed until fire was surging, wanting to turn over and take this man on the spot. Suddenly, not knowing what was wrong with Chang Geng, he blurted out: "Yifu..."

Gu Yun: "..."

This sentence from Chang Geng caused him to instantly soften. No matter how great his passion or desire was, they were rolled up into a ball and forced into an iron cage.

Gu Yun took several breaths and wanted to shout at Chang Geng, "*What are you calling on this occasion?"* But in retrospect, the other was not wrong either.

He heard that some men like this kind of taboo feeling of reciting virtue in private, most willing to let their lovers call them this and that in bed. Unfortunately, Gu Yun had no such hobby and could not understand it completely. During this year and a half, he finally got used to Chang Geng directly calling him by name and gradually stopped looking at him as a son. Who knew that at a crucial moment, suddenly encountering the word 'yifu', he truly bumped into it until his head was dizzy.

Chang Geng seemed unaware of his discomfort and could not restrain himself from calling him a few more times, kissing him without any proper order. There was a hint of respect inside intimacy, making this old hooligan feel like sitting on needles, together with the title of ‘yifu’, it had a great effect.

Gu Yun seemed to have ants crawling up and down all over. Finally, he could not bear it any longer and tilted his head to the side. "Don't call that."

Chang Geng stopped and stared at him quietly for a moment. Suddenly, he dropped close to his ear and said, "Yifu, if you can't see clearly, close your eyes, alright?"

Gu Yun could hear this even if he was any deafer, let alone he had not yet gone completely deaf: "... How energetic are you?”

Chang Geng's eyes shone brightly inside the dark curtain of the bed. He disobediently pressed his voice low and gentle, saying in his ear in the tone of acting spoiled: "Yifu, you said at that time, 'even after arriving in the capital, you will still protect me'. Does yifu remember?"

Gu Yun's face changed several times. He could not resist Chang Geng's new tactics of using him as entertainment. He had to plan a strategic retreat and pushed him away. Gu Yun said, "Alright, don't be shameless. Do what you were supposed to...Ah!"

"What am I supposed to do?" Chang Geng pressed him back again with the help of his previous posture. His hand had reached behind Gu Yun's back. When fixing someone's bones at Jiayu Gate, he had already touched it all. At this time, he suddenly acted with the stable precision of a doctor. Gu Yun trembled violently. Instinctively, he wanted to curl up, but several of his acupoints was pressed by Chang Geng. Half of his body was tingling, only now did Chang Geng casually say the second half of the sentence, "Didn't yifu just ask a sick leave for me, wanting to love me and dote on me?"

Gu Yun: “...Bastard!”

Chang Geng turned a deaf ear, stretched out, and approached closer, determinedly using the evasive position to open Gu Yun’s legs apart with his knee. Gu Yun felt goosebumps all over, pushing Chang Geng’s shoulder away with his palm. He grabbed the hand that was touching him and locked his arm behind his back.

Chang Geng did not resist either, his body as soft as cotton, letting Gu Yun bend him however he pleased. He lifted his head slightly, revealing his weak neck, speaking in the tone of acting spoiled: “Yifu, do you want me?”

Gu Yun continued to hesitate, in the end, he was not able to overcome the emotional wall inside. His hands loosened, letting Chang Geng break free like a fish, coming closer once more.

Chang Geng hugged him, caressing lower along his spine, whispering in his ears: “Then let me serve yifu, alright?”

Gu Yun: "..."

He found himself in a disadvantageous situation this year, continuously having his boat overturned in a pond.

In a twinkling of an eye, the sky was bright and the sun was hanging high.

The brilliant early summer ray of light penetrated through the bed curtain, Chang Geng's eyes were brighter than the sunshine. He really understood what was ‘delusional after many years, momentarily turning mad’. Nightmares were more terrible than reality, but reality was much crazier than a spring dream.

But after this madness, he did not feel empty at all. He was very stable. He had never been this stable in his life. His hands wandered on Gu Yun endlessly, continuing to call for Gu Yun in his ear. He could also feel that he was being annoying, but he just could not control himself and stop.

Sometimes he called 'yifu', sometimes 'Zi Xi', drilling into his ear, making the deaf man whose medicine had worn off forced to listen. Gu Yun also felt the endless heat around his ear. Just now he had missed the opportunity, being tossed about by this kid. At the moment, he was both sleepy and tired yet the other did not even let him sleep. There was no room to talk about right or wrong, He brushed him off unhappily: "Don't make a ruckus!"

Chang Geng caught a glance at his tired face, obediently closing his mouth and gently pressing his waist. His strength was just right, not only relieving the exhaustion but also not touching Gu Yun's magical ticklish flesh.

Gu Yun: "..."

Turned out he had always been deliberate!

Did that woman surnamed Chen taught him how to cure illness or heretical arts!

Gu Yun was just about to combust when suddenly, Chang Geng frowned. He gently pressed his palm on the area of Gu Yun's chest

and abdominal bones, then checked his pulse at the wrist.

Gu Yun said angrily, "Did you not see enough..."

Chang Geng: “When did you get these new injuries?”

Gu Yun: "..."

Oh no, it seemed that aside from heretical arts, surname Chen had also taught him true knowledge, he could even feel this one out!

In the time of crisis, Gu Yun had to use the trick ‘I am deaf, I can't hear anything’, turning over innocently with his back to Chang Geng, indicating that he had fallen asleep, other people could kneel aside.

Chang Geng checked him from top to bottom, but after all, the scary wound had passed for some time. First of all, Chang Geng's medical skill was not as godly as Chen Qing Xu's. Second, Gu Yun's wound had been healed for seventy to eighty percent. Unable to find any abnormality, thus they both continued to fool the other.

His Royal Highness took his sick leave all day. The Grand Council with a number of important ministers sent their men and regards. All of them were sent off by Huo Dan. As someone from the military, the commander’s words were absolute. He ordered that no one must disturb, thus he did not dare to let anyone come disturb. He silently stood at the door serving as a gate god. At the same time, he was still puzzled about how the Marshal came in. With nothing to do, he reinforced the lacking Marquis’s manor guards.

Gu Yun rushed back two days earlier as if he was going to be reborn, staying awake for the entire night. After many troubles, he finally managed to eat some meat, but the position was completely wrong, almost choking him to death. Too exhausted, he slept until the afternoon. After waking up, both his body and mind still felt very strange, he did not know who was the one on sick leave here.

He was about to get angry, but feeling that getting angry over something so trivial was too small-hearted, he had to hold back and think to himself, *"Next time, I must sew his mouth shut."*

Gu Yun fumbled around for his *liuli* glass, but he did not know where the little thing disappeared to. Not able to find it even after searching for a while, he was suddenly being held by a warm hand.

Chang Geng leaned over his ear and said, "General Shen and the others haven't arrived yet. You don't have to go out today. Don't use the medicine, okay? Let me take care of you."

Gu Yun did not use it much either, it did not matter much, he nodded: "No need for taking care, I'm used to it. I can't find my glasses. Go and get me a new one."

Chang Geng hugged him and said, "It was me who took the *liuli* glass."

The relationship between the two seemed to have undergone an indescribable and subtle change.

In fact, since childhood, when they were just father and son, the relationship between them was already very close, and until Chang Geng's inner desire was released, Gu Yun first softened down and compromised, and even fell deeply into it. His family letters and war reports always went hand in hand together, and his affection could not be said to be shallow...

However, it was not the same with the fierce ecstasy of this moment, it seemed that even if the outside enemy surrounded the capital once more, it could all be forgotten, heaven and earth had disappeared, no longer caring about anything else.

Gu Yun asked in bewilderment, "What are you taking my *liuli* glass for?"

Chang Geng laughed and said, "I like it."

Afterwards, he helped Gu Yun dress and carefully bent down to put on his shoes for him, it was all very dedicated and caring.

His Royal Highness all day wearing plain robes, saying no to desire, resembling a monk, those who did not know would think how upright he is. However, after this battle, Gu Yun was able to experience it. Under this person's civilized appearance was a

mountain of desire that normal people could not understand.

Liked what? Liked him being blind?

Chang Geng did not speak very loudly. In order to let Gu Yun hear, he always whispered to his ear. Such sentences as ‘Be careful about the threshold’ and so on would feel intimate. As he walked to the door, Gu half-blind instinctively reached for the door frame but was intercepted gently by his hand. Chang Geng casually said, "Don't touch anything else, just hold on to me."

This unprecedented sense of complete control had made Chang Geng crazy, he was unwilling to let go for even a moment. After a couple of sentences, he would come closer asking for a kiss. After only a short moment, it had already caused Gu Yun to feel goosebumps all over.

Even if Gu Yun were to be beaten to death, he couldn't understand — someone who was originally so alienated and restrained, even avoided looking out of politeness while changing his clothes, how on earth did he become this crazy after only spending one time in bed?

Gu Yun: "Even if I can't see, I am not disabled. You don't have to hold me all the time. Aren't you busy all day long?

Chang Geng: “Then come with me to my study.”

After Gu Yun left, his study was basically Chang Geng's territory. Gu Yun, who had been floating around the border for many years, was somewhat unfamiliar. Chang Geng supported him and sat down. The sunshine hit the face of the people in the study from a very familiar angle. Gu Yun suddenly felt something and stretched out his foot. As a result, he met a small bench under the table: "This thing is still there."

Chang Geng bent over and picked up the stool. He saw a few vivid little turtles painted on the wooden stool, biting each other’s tails and forming a circle. The childish handwriting beside it was engraved with the words ‘Although the tortoise lives long*, if our forces are ten to the enemy's one, surround him’**.

**A line from a song of Cao Cao.*
*** A line from Art of War*

... It didn't even make sense.

Chang Geng smiled for a long time, took Gu Yun's hand and pressed it on the mark, he asked, "Did you carve this?"

"Don't laugh, I did not have many days where I seriously read books when I was a child," Gu Yun looked up slightly. "Books were all read in the palace with the Emperor and *Wei Wang*. The Old Marquis's own education was very ordinary, he was only a bit more diligent with military books. He found an old horrifying Confucian teacher here to read for me, he would doze off after a moment, I could only find entertainment for himself - well, you could go do your things, I haven't been home for a long time, let me walk around for a bit."

"No," Chang Geng said hurriedly, "I like to hear you tell the story, and afterwards?"

Gu Yun was a bit hesitant. It was not any grand achievement, but Chang Geng seldom enjoyed himself like this. Gu Yun paused for a moment, then finally decided to bring out this embarrassing deed to entertain him, "I was very troublesome at that time, even the teacher was afraid of me from all the tricks I pulled to torment him. He dared not scold me face to face but ran back to tell the old man about it. Besides beating people, the old Marquis punished me to take a stance on the stool, falling off with only a slight tremble. He did not appear like a goddamn blood-connected father no matter how you look at it. Later, I thought that old man goatee kept running to tell on me day after day was simply too annoying. I had come up with a scheme with Shen Ji Ping, we stole some laxatives and poured it into the teacher's tea."

"Laxative is nothing, but we are both young, not knowing the proper measure. Teacher is already old and frail, almost dying from it. Throughout two hundred years, the Gu family has not had a house wrecking and crazy child like this, the old Marquis was enraged, wanting to beat me to death, fortunately, the Princess stopped him.

“Well, my mother later admitted that she too wants to hit me at that time, but it was difficult for her to give birth due to her cold body. She was afraid that after killing me, there will be no one left for the Gu family.”

Chang Geng imagined that if he had such a disobedient child, he would have to beat it to death. However, as he immediately remembered that the unfortunate child was Gu Yun, he thought that if he were to be the old Marquis, even if Gu Yun’s trickery cost someone's life, he would have to go pay for their life in person and would never have the heart to touch even one of his hair.

He could not help laughing for a long time then asked, "What happened next?"

Gu Yun slightly paused, the smile on his face could not be maintained, he looked slightly restrained. After being silent for a moment, he then said: "Later, they both felt that I would become lawless if it were to go on like this, so they simply took me to the Black Iron Camp in the Northern Frontier.”

And his childhood of being despised by both cats and dogs came to an abrupt end.

The author has something to say:

Turn off the lamp (⊙▽⊙)

Chapter 80: Secret Concern

—

I have never had such a good dream, it would be nice if I do not have to wake up.

—

This was perhaps the most unforgettable pain in his life. As Gu Yun got here, he did not go on talking. However, it might be that those words have been piling up in his mind for many years, and for a moment, he could not hold back.

"The Northern Frontier is very poor, just after the war, there are wounded soldiers everywhere. Every day, when the sun sets in the golden sands, even the princess's underling can not drink a cup of hot tea. How could it be as good as being a young master in the capital? At first, I threw a tantrum, wanting to go back at all costs. The old Marquis did not agree. Annoyed by me, he took me to the army. Every day the soldiers of the Black Iron Camp would train, and I had to accompany them at the side to practice martial arts. If I slacked off for even a little, he would hit me in front of those iron giants."

The old Marquis reckoned his son's personality, even if he hid away, even if he was weak, but in front of everyone, this little thing that was not as tall as someone's thighs, it would never cry and humiliate itself.

Chang Geng glued to him, placing his chin on Gu Yun's shoulder, leaned towards his ear and said, "If I were born twenty years earlier, I would pick you up and steal you away, and raise you in beautiful silk and brocade."

Gu Yun imagined the scene for a moment and wanted to vomit on the spot, not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

In fact, when thinking about it, a family with an extravagant lifestyle declining from the third generation was very usual. Gu Yun, a child of this origin, who was also an only child, if he really was allowed to lawlessly grow up in the capital city, who knew how

terrible he would turn out to be. Only a cruel father like the old Marquis could have the heart to bend him so that the Black Iron Camp would have a successor.

But nobody expected that the cost of success was too high.

"Uncle Wang said that when you came back from the Northern Frontier, your temperament changed. You did not like to see anyone, and did not care for anyone either" Chang Geng paused, took his hand and wrote, "Do you despise the former Emperor?"

Gu Yu unconsciously tried to reach for the wine bottle at his waist, but as he reached out, he remembered that he had decided to quit drinking. The bottle had not been on his body for a long time.

Gu Yun pursed his lips: "I don't... Pour me a cup of tea."

Chang Geng almost thought he had heard wrong.

Just after the siege of the capital was over, Gu Yun was wounded to the point of being unable to climb up, yet as soon as he opened his mouth, he immediately asked for a drink regardless. How come after one battle at the Northern Frontier, he now knew how to watch out for his health?

Although Chang Geng had always secretly complained about this drunkard, not only was he not happy to see his sudden change of temperament, he instead felt terrified. He stood up and brewed Gu Yun a cup of spring tea. Once again, concerned and suspicious, he held Gu Yun's wrist quietly, hating that he had not learned properly and was not able to come to a result with his check.

Although his eyes and ears were inconvenient, Gu Yun could still feel his nervousness and immediately realized he had left an opening. Chang Geng was too sensitive. If a person had badly behaved all the time, he might as well continue to be worse. The people who followed him to clean up after we're already used to it. On the contrary, his sudden change of temperament without warning would make people feel at a loss.

Gu Yun then drank the tea and licked his lips as if nothing had

happened. "I don't know where my wine bottle had fallen off. Is there any self-brewed wine from Old Shen left from last time?"

This sentence sounded more like Gu Yun's style. Turned out that he was thirsty after talking for a long time, Chang Geng was relieved and outright refused, "They are all out, drink tea instead."

Gu Yun half-truthfully and half-falsely made a *'tch'* sound, then something was pushed into his mouth, a sticky, sweet and greasy taste of glutinous rice filled his nose, Gu Yun leaned back: "What is it? I don't want to eat... Uh..."

Chang Geng fed it to him by his mouth.

Gu Yun's eyebrows crumpled. He was naturally born not fond of sweetness. The sweetness of tea and cake and Chang Geng caused him to choke up, but he did not spit it out. Like the egg noodles with eggshells many years ago, he ate them all and could feel the bitter taste from the too sweet bean paste filling.

Suddenly he was a little uneasy, he felt that Chang Geng's tiresome clinginess was quite unusual. The suspicion when hearing he did not drink wine was also unusual.

Due to the exhaustion of mentality, joy and sorrow often did not last long, usually only sparked for a short time, then either turning to numbness, or the parties themselves divert their attention, diluting these emotions instinctively in order to protect themselves.

Gu Yun said, "Chang Geng, give me the liuli glass."

"No," Chang Geng surrounded him similar to caging, asking relentlessly, "Why do you not despise him?"

His last question was both eager and indifferent. He was eager to get a 'hate' and 'do not hate' answer. It was as if as long as Gu Yun admitted to 'hate', he would then decide what actions he would take next.

The indifference was that he seemed to forget that the 'former Emperor' he spoke of was his father, casually mentioning it, as careless as mentioning a cat or a dog on the roadside.

Gu Yun was silent for a moment and asked, "What about you? Do you still hate Hu Ge Er?"

Chang Geng did not expect that he would throw back his own question at him. He blinked a little unexpectedly. If Gu Yun could see clearly at this time, he would find that although his eyes were not red, he still faintly had double pupils.

Chang Geng righteously replied: "If she is still in front of me, I will definitely skin her. But she had died with no place to be buried. Even if I were to dig up her corpse and whipped it, it will still be in vain. No matter how much I hate her, there is no way to eliminate it. But instead, I will speed up the poisoning as she wished, right?"

These were by no means his sincere words. Even if Gu Yun was any deafer, he could still realize this.

Gu Yun was about to speak when he suddenly felt the person clinging to him jolted - the shock of sudden interruption and fright when he was absorbed in something.

Behind him came a gust of wind, as if someone had knocked on the door of the study.

Gu Yun turned over and asked, "Is it Uncle Wang or Old Huo?"

The old housekeeper at the door raised his voice and shouted, "Marquis, it's me. There are people from Ling Shu Institute looking for His Highness Yan Wang!"

Chang Geng's double pupils shrank back. At first glance, they seemed to be stimulated by the strong light. He unconsciously let go of Gu Yun and showed the usual restraint, as if he just thought of something, a hint of bewilderment flashing on his face.

Gu Yun pretended not to notice: "If you are busy then go handle it, I haven't had a proper meal for several days, I will go find something to eat, I don't know what the hell you just stuffed into my mouth... making the acid water in my stomach rising up."

Chang Geng was stunned at first. Then patted his forehead severely and rubbed his eyebrows with regret: "I... That... I am

really..."

He stood up and said, "I will ask the kitchen to make something easy to digest for you first."

Uncle Wang quickly said, "Yes, your servant will go now."

As Chang Geng came to the door of his study, he seemed to remember something and searched himself. He found Gu Yun's glass and returned it to him. The metal chain and the outer frame were warmed up by him. Chang Geng wiped the lens carefully and put it on Gu Yun's nose. His eyes lingered on his face for a long time. Suddenly, he whispered, "Zi Xi, just...just now, I feel like I was dreaming."

This was why he had acted that way.

Gu Yun was tossed about by him and his chatter for the entire noon. He was very angry as he heard this, wanting to bite back, *"Let me give you a slap to see if you get hurt or not".*

Unexpectedly, before he could say it, Chang Geng had paused and stood up straight, he let out a bitter laugh ridiculing himself: "Even after growing so big, I have never had such a good dream, it would be nice if I do not have to wake up."

Gu Yun: "..."

He had returned normal, Gu Yun could not bear to scold him harshly. He felt that if this several more times, he will become just like the other. He had to put on an indistinguishable look and waved his hand shooing him away.

In the early summer of the eighth year of Long An, though General Gu repeatedly went against the Tai Sui* star, the national situation of Great Liang began to recover slowly after falling to the bottom of the valley, as if a long winter had passed by and fragments of buds began to emerge under the endless snow.

**it is believed that multiple disasters would befall someone if they went against the Tai Sui star, an imaginary star that is opposite of Jupiter*

In the summer, the first thing was to settle the turmoil of the Western countries and sign the New Silk Road Treaty. The Black Iron Camp escorted the Ziliujin tribute from the Western Regions to the capital.

At this point, Great Liang that was surrounded in all directions finally broke out an opening.

Shen Yi and others had just arrived at the front foot, Ling Shu Institute had delivered good news.

Gu Yun's large iron bow, which had never been promoted in the army, finally made a new breakthrough. Ge Chen, the rising star from a butcher's family, was indeed a genius. He designed a new gold box, extremely portable and convenient. It could be mounted on the bow, perfectly controllable by human strength.

The bow which ordinary people could not pull had its string's weight reduced by more than half. The iron bow could be shot effortlessly by human hands. The precision was very high, the iron arrow was thick and not easily affected by the wind. Once these bows were made on a large scale, the *baihong* will disappear in the Great Liang Army. The iron arrow could be added with the firearm system, after shot put, it could be accelerated for a second time, it could even explode in the enemy line with great power.

At the end of June, when the contradiction between Black Iron Camp's covetousness of tigers and the Western countries became more and more prominent, the war situation on both sides of the North and the South was temporarily stabilized, and Great Liang was given a chance to breathe. As the whole court knew, the most urgent task at this time was to reassure the people, especially to settle the refugees in various parts due to the war.

But how should they rest and settle down?

It was impossible to distribute farm property to these refugees. No man would be so generous and righteous as to give his own land to others.

The Grand Council organized several meetings to summon the

ministers to discuss, but never came to a conclusion, only collecting a bunch of bad ideas, such as sending the refugees to go open up the wasteland and so on. The Emperor of Long An was furious, scolding the bunches of ministers only sitting around: "Why don't you round up the refugees and exile them to the Eastern Sea to imitate Jingwei*?"

**Jingwei is a bird from Chinese mythology who rounds up pebbles or twigs from the land and throws them to the Eastern Sea*

Suddenly, *Yan Wang* of the Grand Council took the lead in silence and did not make a statement. Six ministries and local officials took the blame on each other and made quarrel in court. At this moment, Du Wan Quan and his thirteen giant merchants from all over the country sent their request, claiming that they were willing to follow the example of Westerners, setting up private factories everywhere, and gather refugees from all directions for work.

This did not require much land. At that time, Chang Geng's money confiscated from the corrupt officials along the canal who did not make arrangements for the refugees would be enough. They also planned to use the farming puppets in Jiangnan as a model and assemble a group of non-governmental Mechanics to create a series of machines for civil use.

With the distribution of the second batch of *Feng Huo* tickets, a force resembling an undercurrent gradually gathered in the court. When they were still dormant, at first glance, there was no faction at all. At this time, they began to promote this matter in secret: first giving some concessions to the first group of merchants who volunteered to come out to carry the *Feng Huo* tickets, for example, they could directly send their request to the Grand Council, with special approval granted by the Emperor, allowing them to purchase a certain amount of *Ziliujin* every year under the condition of guaranteeing military use.

This discount was first presented from the Ministry of Industry - Meng Juan, a humble scholar of Han Lin origin, stated in the discount that this was a plan of killing three birds with one arrow — this would not only solve the riots of refugees everywhere but also showed that the court would not mistreat who had made merits and

that the money earned from selling Ziliujin at a high price to these giants merchants could also be put into the extra military and war supplies.

This stone stirred up a thousand waves. This time, some people in noble families with a keen sense of smell finally came back to their senses.

Gu Yun, who had not been in court for a long time, was lucky enough to get to listen in to the grand scene of how the court went against each other with swords and arrows. He was stunned, feeling that this place was more dangerous than the frontline.

Thirteen giant merchants wrote a paper, causing the contradiction between the scholar clan and the talented young ones who started from Han Lin to sharply intensify. At this time, smart people have found the secret trade between the officials and businessmen. Some were even more sensitive. They have realized that the irresistible future of this new force would shake the essence of the scholar clan, and a sense of crisis arose quietly.

In the court, the supporters of the merchant groups sent accusations to the noble families - 'forming into factions for selfish purposes, harming the country and the people', 'easier said than done'. What's more, they even pointed at the other's nose and scolded, "If you gentlemen have an idea, then let the refugees go to your house to settle down".

Several big noble families were red with anger and debated fiercely: "How can the merchants and businessmen ascend the hall of elegance", "how can the most important thing of the nation like *Ziliujin* flow into private hands". Finally, they simply said, "I don't know how much bribes you gentlemen had accepted to act like family with those businessmen."

Afterward, the Marquis of Order who had not said a word causing the row of generals to looked at each other in silence, stood on the side watching the argument. In the end, the Grand Council had to step out to ease them up.

Gu Yun looked up at Emperor Long An and realized that Li Feng

truly had grown old. He was only his thirties, yet there were already grey hairs all over, his expression ferocious and gloomy. For a moment, Gu Yun suddenly thought, "Perhaps that time when the capital was on the verge of being lost, if Li Feng on the red kite was struck down by a stray arrow, would that have been a better fate for him?"

Li Feng seemed to feel something. He happened to look up and met Gu Yun's line of sight.

After the court was dismissed that day, Gu Yun was kept in the palace. Before the war, the two had fallen out to the point of turning away from another. After that, Gu Yun had been running everywhere to battle, his horse had never stopped. There was hardly any chance to meet in private.

Right now, they stood in the place they grew up together to have a few chats about the old days, feeling like it was separated by a lifetime.

Li Feng keeping Gu Yun behind was due to his momentary impulse. Only until they walked side by side in the flower garden did he discover there were no words he could say, it was undoubtedly embarrassing.

Just then, the Crown Prince came to greet them after school had been done.

Li Feng was not one to immerse in the inner palace, he did not have many children. The prince had just reached the age of eight. He had not yet begun to hit his growth spurt and still appeared very childish. He had a bit of restraint when meeting Li Feng, formally and obediently saying, "Royal Father."

He then looked at Gu Yun carefully and hesitantly, he was a little eager to talk but did not know who the man was.

Gu Yun smiled at him: "Your subject Gu Yun, greetings to Your Royal Highness the Crown Prince."

The prince was shocked. There was no little boy who did not

love to hear the story of grand heroes. Right now as he got to meet one in the flesh, on one hand, he was very excited, but on the other, he had to maintain the dignity of a prince in front of his father. His face blushed red, tumbling through his words: "General...General Gu! No... That... Grand Uncle does not have to be polite. I... I've also practiced my handwriting using Grand Uncle's sample."

Gu Yun's expression was a little strange: "... Your Highness is very kind."

The word 'Grand Uncle' had delivered an invisible blow on him, making him feel like he had grown a two-foot-long beard.

Li Feng waved back all the servants, leaving only the prince to accompany him. Nobody knew what he had talked with Gu Yun. The palace people only knew that the little prince seemed to have a great affinity with the Marquis of Order, clinging to him and would not leave. Finally, he even fell asleep on Gu Yun's shoulder and was sent back to the East Palace by the Marquis himself.

Before leaving, Emperor Long An had specifically asked Gu Yun to come to the palace, giving some pieces of advice to the prince if he had time.

The monarch and the subject had a pleasant conversation, the matter of the Emperor and the Marquis turning against each other, the centrifuge between military and political affairs seemed to be only a small ripple deliberately forgotten.

At this time, at an elegant private room in Wangnan Tower, Jiang Chong rushed in and took out a secret letter from his sleeve and handed it to Chang Geng: "Take a look at this, His Highness, our foundation in the court was not yet stable. This time, it seemed we are a little too hasty."

It was a copy of a report. Jiang Chong said in a low voice: "This came from inside the palace. After the court was dismissed, several big families had gone through with Imperial Uncle, joining forces to send this report directly to the Emperor. I'm afraid they have planned this for a long time."

Chang Geng took over the paper with an unchanged look: "Imperial Uncle Wang? Was his own bottom clean yet? During this period of war and turmoil, General Tan died in the capital. Does he feel that there is no one left to investigate him?"

Jiang Chong pressed his voice even lower: "Your Highness, Imperial Uncle Wang is from the mother side of the Empress Dowager, as long as there is no scheme for rebellion, the Emperor will not touch him... And who would dare to mention the incident that year? If using this as the reason to overthrow the Imperial Uncle, would the former Emperor not fall into the reputation of an incompetent ruler who was deceived by the villains and witches, killing loyal subjects? The Emperor would not deal with him because of this."

Chang Geng quickly swept over the copied paper with a blank expression. Suddenly, he let out an '*oh*'.

Jiang Chong: "What is it?"

Chang Geng: "This does not seem like something that could come from Wang Guo. Whose creation is this?"

Jiang Chong: "Oh, this man has a very close relationship with Wang Ye. Didn't Fang family use to intend to marry Wang Ye? The man who hid the knife behind his back is Miss Fang's uncle, the current Minister of Household, was originally the first *Zhangyuan** who was selected by the former Emperor in the eighteenth year of Yuan He. The only one who came first in all three examinations at the provincial capital, national capital, and the palace from the former dynasty, he truly was outstanding since childhood.

**top scorer in the Imperial examination*

Since Fang Qin took over the position of the Minister of Household, everything was well-organized, well-coordinated with the Grand Council, there was never any hindrance. He could be said to be a capable minister. Unfortunately, the bottom decides the head. He was born in Fang's family and was a representative for the Fang's family. He was doomed to be a stumbling block for outstanding talent.

"The examiner for more than half of the court, unrivaled reputation." Chang Geng tapped on the table gently. "Beneath the eaves of their lordships, swallows used to nest. It seems that it's time for them to fly to the homes of ordinary people.*"

**Chang Geng was quoting/referencing the poem by Liu Yuxi, "Lane of Black-Gown Mansions"*

Jiang Chong's heart jumped when he was able to make out the killing intent in what he had just said.

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Sorry for the delayed updates than usual ;_; I've been busy on my side with consecutive field works in far flung places, an upcoming conference, another field work next week, and lots of laboratory time. I'm on my thesis period in grad school, too ;_; Please hold on for a while, sorry again OTL
-Shy

Chapter 81: Marriage

—

When you are sorrowful, I am there with you, when I am sorrowful, you rejoice in my misfortune...

—

But not yet waiting for Jiang Chong to catch it, Chang Geng once again casually praised as if nothing happened: "Minister Fang is truly talented, a great officer who could govern the world in peace time*."

**There was an old saying: a great officer in peacetime, a traitor in war time*

Yan Wang spoke lightly and applauded sincerely, as if the killing intent that could not be described just now was Jiang Chong's own imagination. Only the words ‘in peace time’ was used very subtly.

Fang Qin's paper pointed directly to the concerns of Emperor Long An. He did not comment on whether it was good or bad to classify the refugees into factories. He only held on to the safety problems of *Ziliujin* supervision, and even dragged Gu Yun into this: "The thing that tens of thousands of Black Iron Camp generals who fought hard in the front line to bring back, how could we use them freely? Would that not make the loyal soldiers and generals feel disappointed?”

Gu Yun himself would not care too much about it, but Li Feng's scales were greatly provoked*. When Chang Geng advised Zhang Feng Han to concede on the *Ziliujin* matter, he also said, to an Emperor, *Ziliujin* resembled another national seal, starting from the beginning of the wise and godly Emperor Wu. Moreover, the royal private treasury accumulated in Jinghua Garden for generations was burnt in an hour. Since then, it was natural that Li Feng would only feel insecure.

**to provoke someone's scale is to touch at a topic sensitive to them*

Later, Fang Qin gave a detailed list of the possible consequences

of selling *Ziliujin* to private businessmen.

For example, after opening this gap, how would they be able to identify the *Ziliujin* in the hands of private businessmen whether they were bought from the court, or were smuggled?

If the price of *Ziliujin* smuggled by foreigners was lower, then the profit-seeking businessmen would naturally favor the illegal goods. Private collection, private sale, and smuggling of *Ziliujin* had been prohibited repeatedly but could not be eliminated, would it not become even more out of control in the future?

For another example, if there was no accident, the factory building industry would last longer than the ordinary people's lifetime. Even if the court only granted these thirteen private business permissions, what would their descendants do?

The place that required *Ziliujin* would only grow more and more in the future, otherwise it would be difficult to continue on. Thus, must the court give their children and grandchildren permission as well? What about the separation of children and grandchildren? What if the factory was bought? If the permission could also be sold, then was it not too convenient for criminals to hoard steel armor and firearms for rebellion in the future?

But if this kind of permission could only be granted once, to the person and not the factory, then when the thirteen people with the permit died and the factory would be dismissed, would it not return to the scene of refugees running rampant?

Now this generation of refugees knew that it was the foreign enemies who caused them to run astray. It was the court that had given them food and a place to be. But what would they think if after decades, refugees reappeared once again? They would only think that it was the court that had forcefully withdrawn their permit, smashing their means of making a living... In this way, would it not solve the temporary crisis but planted endless disasters?

In addition, there were various other concerns, Fang Qin finally concluded in elegant terms: in summary, those who encouraged the sale of *Ziliujin* to private merchants were either simple-minded,

worrying about the head but not the tail, only looking at the present but not how the future would end, or simply a stick stirring shit up, fishing in troubled waters, there was no telling what their intention was.

Minister Fang was incredibly skillful with a pen, a long paper with each and every sentence poking into the heart of Emperor Long An.

"If this paper was sent to the Grand Council first by the usual way, we would still have the ability to stop it," Jiang Chong exclaimed, "but... alas, the Fang family's power is deeply rooted in the court."

Chang Geng suddenly laughed.

Jiang Chong was baffled by his laughter.

Yan Wang slowly took a sip of the tea from the table and said, whether consciously or unconsciously, "What Minister Fang spoke of was a matter of urgency, not a bunch of nonsensical praises and virtue. His words were very reasonable, there was nothing wrong with them. Even if it was sent to the Grand Council, what reason do we have to stop it? Han Shi, was what you said logical? What is the Grand Council? Is it a place used to cheat and disrespect the people up and down? Taking advantage of power to throw off the proper order?"

Although he spoke in a mild tone, his words were heavy. Jiang Chong was shocked: "Your Highness..."

Chang Geng, with a slightly restrained look, interrupted him faintly: "Today's words that came from your mouth, flowing into my ears, they will not reach a third person, let's forget it. But I do not want to hear similar words again in the Grand Council."

Jiang Chong responded hurriedly: "Yes, this lowly officer has gone too far."

Chang Geng's face softened down and told a lie: "My experience is limited. When I encounter a problem, my experience and self-

cultivation are insufficient. I regard you as my own family thus I have not considered my words, whether they are too light or too heavy. Brother Han Shi, don't take it to heart."

Jiang Chong continuously said, "I dare not".

He was promoted by *Yan Wang*. Others would assume that he was his trusted servant, but he himself felt more and more unable to see through the superior he owed a lot to.

It was certain that the forces headed by Fang family would not sit back and watch the new patch of officials who took advantage of these opportunities when the country lacked money to raise up, they would spare no effort to suppress them.

Others may not be clear, but Jiang Chong knew that these so-called 'new officials' were precisely supported by *Yan Wang* — from the reform of officials, and even earlier, from when the issue of *Feng Huo* tickets begun, it was already paving the way.

If he had prepared slowly for so long, then what was his final goal?

Was His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* truly selfless, was everything he did to alleviate the country from the temporary crisis? Did he really have no desire just as how he had always shown himself, and when the foreign enemy would withdraw, he would immediately go home to be an idle prince who ate royal salary?

If that was the case, why did he have to work so hard to lay out such a large foundation?

But if *Yan Wang* was only deceiving the world with this great lie, and that he had another plan in mind... what else could he calculate?

He was the only living relative of the current Emperor , and the only prince of Great Liang. If he wanted to go further, the only thing left....was *that* position.

But this was totally unreasonable. If *Yan Wang* really intended to become the Emperor, when Emperor Long An personally told him to succeed, why did he resist the decree?

To say the least, even if he refused at that time then started to regret it, why did he use the status of *Yan Wang* to offend all the most important ministers of the court? Wasn't it more rational to pull more people to his side?

In confusion, Jiang Chong asked carefully, "But your Highness, even after this officer read the paper, I am also full of doubts about the establishment of private factories, let alone the Emperor? But if this cannot be carried out, then how can the court appease to the people who have made great contributions to the country like Master Du, and how can the refugees be settled down?"

"You were wrong about this matter," Chang Geng said with a profound laugh. "The Emperor will only be full of doubts about the sale of *Ziliujin* to private merchants after he sees it. Now that Master Fang has made it so clear that the sale of *Ziliujin* for merchants is not feasible, why don't we think about how to solve this problem. Would that not satisfy both parties?"

Jiang Chong was stunned.

Chang Geng: "Go back and prepare for it, the gentlemen should arrive a little earlier tomorrow. The Grand Council will discuss this matter before the court meeting. Don't let my Royal Brother down."

Jiang Chong responded then stood up to say goodbye. For a moment, from *Yan Wang*'s very calm words, he could hear some indescribable certainty in them. It seemed as if he had already anticipated this paper from Fang Qin and had already thought of the solution to deal with it next.

But... if he already had a solution, why did he not start by putting it forward? Why must he take a roundabout way?

What's the use of this route, besides intensifying the contradiction between the newcomers of the *Feng Huo* tickets and the noble families?

"Oh, by the way, Han Shi." Chang Geng called him.

Jiang Chong, who had a heavy heart, came back to his senses,

thinking that he had something important to instruct him. He listened attentively.

Chang Geng: “Ask Wangnan Building to wrap up two kilograms of fried small yellow croaker with salt for me. I'll take it back later. Thank you very much.”

Master Jiang slipped and almost rolled down the stairs.

At this time, Gu Yun, who was kept behind by Emperor Long An, was able to leave before the door of the palace was locked.

The deployment of battle equipment could only be submitted to the Emperor for approval by the Grand Council after it was reviewed by the Marquis of Order. The latest *Ziliujin* deployment plan should be handed over to Gu Yun after the court, who knew that the Emperor had kept him behind until this hour. Shen Yi had to wait until the night was approaching. As he was yawning in boredom, he saw Gu Yun slowly walking out.

"What took you so long?" Shen Yi stepped up. "I even assumed you were quarrelling with the Emperor again over something."

Gu Yun took the paper he was going to present and turned it over. "I will look at it after I get home — what is there to quarrel about, already at this age."

Shen Yi: "..."

He looked at Gu Yun in shock, his tongue tied together: "Al...Already at this age? Marshal, are you okay? What did the Emperor say to you?”

How did it turn the 'northwest flower' showing his beauty all day long to become 'already at this age'!

Gu Yun glanced sadly at his shoulder. The little prince’s drool was still wet from lying on him.

If a person was single for a long time, it was always easy to feel

that they were still in their youth. Unknowingly, he had moved up to the rank of being a ‘granduncle’. It suddenly reminded him that if he were to be someone with a short lifespan, he had already gone through half of his life.

"Nothing." Gu Yun said absently as he walked along, "Maybe he was frustrated by the noisy court arguments, grabbing me to say a few tiring words... From childhood, the Emperor had always loved to fight for power and was eager to win. He must overwhelm others in everything he did. When he first came to the throne, it was not like he never thought about coming to Mt. Tai presenting his merits to the heaven, yet over the years he had become like this, He...well, it had not been easy either."

Shen Yi, with his hands behind his back, listened silently. Every time as it came to these damn rotten things involving royalty, he always felt incredibly tired. With Emperor Yuan He who had already entered the Imperial Mausoleum as the leader, that one was more capricious than the other. Three joyful days, he would bestow upon one immense grace, brought them to power that could command the world. Two hateful days, he would turn one into a prisoner in the blink of an eye. If one did not do a good job, there was no telling whose blade their life was hanging onto.

Taking a look at Emperor Yuan He, if he had been able to be resolute from the start, Gu Yun who had been reborn again would be old enough to get married already. However, on one hand, the man wanted to eliminated the Gu family, yet time and time again, he did not have the heart to do it. Like a cold-hearted hunter who had sealed off the tiger's den, everything had already been done, yet he had softened in front of the trembling tiger cub, taking it home instead and raised like a cat. Genuine killing intent, but also genuine adoration — in the end, it had raised one Gu Yun with deep sentiment. He really did not know whether it was a success or a failure.

Shen Yi sighed, "We do not know the difficulties in the court since we have always been fighting outside. We can now see it had not been easy for His Highness *Yan Wang* over this half a year. Guess what, my father still said to me yesterday, saying that I was a ’Cylon who lost his horse, perhaps it could be a blessing’. Although my

family was not famous, we have participated in the imperial examination for generations, rightfully earning royal salaries. At that time, I stubbornly insisted on entering Ling Shu. The old man was fine, but my aunts and grandmother were crazy. Later, I ran out of Ling Shu to join the army with you, becoming even worse... *tch*, let's not mention it anymore. In short, in the eyes of my aunts and uncles, I truly am a hopeless family disgrace."

Gu Yun disapproved: "You have earned real military merits, how can it be a disgrace?"

"That's to say, but now my old man felt that this is fortunate," Shen Yi said. "He said that nowadays there are hidden forces everywhere, the situation is getting more and more complicated. Instead, it's better and more certain to follow you out there to battle. At least the point of the muzzle is aimed directly at the enemy."

Gu Yun, on the other hand, did not feel at ease, but more stuck. He did not know what role Chang Geng played in this chaotic court. So far, the Grand Council seemed to be only meant for a special period. The entire country using 'prioritizing battle' to coordinating the national strength and the ministers, although they imitated the system of the former dynasty, serving as the center directly presenting the papers to the Emperor, commanding six departments, but each of the people inside still retained his or her original position as if the Grand Council could be abolished at any time once the war situation had subsided.

With *Yan Wang* as the leader, the Grand Council had been revolving around the needs of the Emperor and the major military regions. The intent of its members seemed to be covered in a thick fog.

"Let's not talk about these bad things anymore," Shen Yi interrupted his thoughts. "By the way, does His Highness *Yan Wang* still live in the Marquis's manor? What on earth is going on between the two of you?"

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi wasn't able to catch the expression of 'one word could

not describe it all' on his face. He chattered to himself: "I heard that in the past, His Highness *Yan Wang* always lived in the Grand Council for a long time. Recently, he started to come home on time. It seems to have started with your return to the capital... Even if he does not take it seriously, he would not dare to use you as an entertainment either."

He talked about his feelings. Gu Yun did not know whether he was expressing his feelings for *Yan Wang*'s difficulties, that the surname Gu should quickly go with him, or was he warning Gu Yun that this love would shock the world, that he should stop when it should be. Gu Yun could not grasp his meaning, He frowned and said, "I don't understand, what do you mean?"

"It means I don't know what to do about this either," Shen Yi said, scratching his ear, "I am only worrying about you."

Gu Yun: "..."

He felt that Shen Yi was not worrying about him, but simply bringing further more discomfort to him.

But either way, they had already slept together, Shen Yi's words were already eight lifetimes too late. Although Marshal Gu had a thick skin, it was not convenient to announce this to the world either.

Seeing that Shen Yi was still following him, and did not seem to want to go back to his own house, he raised his eyebrows angrily and said, "What are you following me for? Are you going come to the manor and watch how I worry?"

Shen Yi let out a stiff laugh and said, "Zi Xi, we have been friends for so many years. Let me have a meal?"

Gu Yun said in surprise, "Your family is too poor to cook?"

Shen Yi, contrary to his usual broken mouth, hesitated for a while before saying, "My father... recently, he wanted to arrange a marriage for me, *um*... he was a little too enthusiastic, I can not provoke the old man, hence I had to hide everywhere — hey, do you have enough, stop laughing, is there anyone who would repay

kindness with betrayal like this? *Hmp*, when you are sorrowful, I am there with you, when I am sorrowful, you rejoice in my misfortune..."

In the middle of his speech, Gu Yun laughed until he was unable to breathe: "I... truly had my eyes opened. For the first time, I saw a general who had to go ask for a free meal due to being forced to marry."

Shen Yi: "... Gu Zi Xi, are we still friends? Just shut up and treat me to a good meal, then I will forgive you."

He regretted not taking good advantage of when Gu Yun was unable to get out of bed to take revenge. Truly — good and honest people always got bullied.

After Gu Yun was tired with laughter, he comforted him just for the sake of it. "Come on, please count your blessings. Someone was there to urge meant that your parents are healthy, I do not have anyone to urge me even if I wanted."

Shen Yi listened with a somewhat lonely look and said, "My father may be afraid that I will die on the battlefield and was anxious to reserve a descendant for Shen family. For so many years, I truly had never managed to cease his worry, that is... I know for myself that I am very particular by nature, if I had a wife and children, I'm afraid it would be difficult for my mind to stay focused in the frontier. You're already lonely enough. If I were to leave as well…"

Gu Yun did not laugh, he stopped and looked back at him from two steps away.

Shen Yi: "Recently I can see that you intend to quit after you succeed. When the foreigners had been driven back, the Emperor can not trouble you anymore. Besides, His Highness *Yan Wang*, who was careful and righteous since childhood, towards you, he... I'm sure he can take care of you. I have been drifting for so many years, it's time for me to settle down and start a family."

"Ji Ping," Gu Yun said, "Is it possible that..."

Shen Yi waited for him to speak.

Gu Yun: "... You are also secretly in love with me?"

Shen Yi tripped over the rocks on the ground.

Gu Yun shook his head and sighed, "Natural beauty is hard to abandon, being too handsome is also a crime."

At last, Shen Yi could not bear it. He roared, "Do you still know shame!"

In an instant, all of General Shen's concern and sorrow turned into a rage. He quarrelled with Gu Yun all the way back to the manor. Unexpectedly, they met *Yan Wang* who had just returned from Wangnan Building at the gate.

In front of General Shen, Chang Geng greeted him very politely and handed Gu Yun the pack of small yellow croaker. "These just came out of the pot Last time, yifu said it was delicious, I had bought a little along the way."

Shen Yi laughed stiffly.

Gu Yun let out a dry cough.

Chang Geng's gaze and expression - Shen Yi felt that his decision to come to the Marquis's Manor for a meal was very wrong, even his eyes had gone blind. Gu Yun already felt his waist ache as he heard the words 'yifu'.

His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* had immediately defeated two generals who were jumping about with his appearance, and with a smile, he led them into the door.

Chapter 82: Idle Talks

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No matter how exhausted he was physically and mentally every day, this moment was when his heart relaxed the most. He wished that it could go on like this until the end of time.

—

No matter what, Shen Yi was still a commander. On regular days, only Gu Yun would treat him too casually, two words of deep friendship, immediately quarreling in the next three. Others could not be so impolite and must regard him as a guest. Gu Yun did not manage this matter, Chang Geng himself had to go to instruct the servants.

Shen Yi started to become tense as soon as he entered the manor. He was restless for a moment then carefully glanced at the back of *Yan Wang*'s tall and lean stature, asking Gu Yun, "Did you do *it*?"

"..." Gu Yun could not express it in one word, hesitating for a moment, he vaguely made a noise in response, "Mm."

Shen Yi's whole body was in discomfort, he finally understood why Gu Yun was dodging the topic on the way. At one hand he felt shocked. At the other, he was helpless. Spouting *'You, you and you'* for half a day, but not one complete sentence could be said.

It was not convenient for Gu Yun to explain too much in details, so like how a dead pig would not be afraid of boiling water*, he sat on the side, opening the oil-paper bag and took out the crispy salted fish to eat.

**idiom that means nothing would bother them anymore*

Shen Yi knew that he was partially heartless, but did not expect

that he was this heartless. His heart resembling a nosy mother surged up and down, he said in pain, "You... How could you... Momentary pleasure, what will we do in the future, huh? The two of you will continue to entangle like this? Where would the proper order be! No one dares to manage someone like you who dominated one side, but what about *Yan Wang*? Would the Emperor agree to it? In case of any change in the future, there will be separation, letting go of the many years of sentiment! You...what am I supposed to say to you here, Gu Zi Xi? You're an animal! "

Gu Yun wiped the pepper and salt grains on his mouth. Getting hit by the word 'animal', he was so wronged that he had to sit on the side with an unfathomable expression, unable to explain himself.

Shen Yi's words were obvious nonsense. Of course, Gu Yun had thought about it before.

If it was a matter of being unable to hold back feelings, then he could control himself. This world was complex, one could not control others, but could control themselves.

If the deeply ingrained feelings could not be forgotten, then find a brick to smash the head, parents and ancestors and one's own name would all be forgotten, let alone feelings?

But it was not so...

Chang Geng's body had the Bone of Impurity since childhood, making him unable to let go no matter the case. Instead of pacifying Chang Geng, it seemed he had made it turn from bad to worse. Even until today, Gu Yun still did not know whether the step he took was right or wrong.

It's just that entangling danger and melancholy could not be expressed to an outsider.

Gu Yun calmly said, "In the future when Jiangnan is recovered, I will take him away. It does not matter what others say. As long as I am alive for a day, I will protect him for a day."

He spoke lightly, but Shen Yi gasped for a moment, glaring at

him. Gu Yun picked up a small yellow croaker with crispy salt. After thinking about it, he broke it in half and gave it to him, "Remember to eat quickly later, go away after you finish. Didn't you see how busy he was in the Grand Council all day long? Learn how to read the mood."

Shen Yi almost choked on the fish to death, turning upside down from rage. He lowered his voice and said angrily, "I come all the way here to worry for you, yet you present to me this display of forgetting friendship as soon as there is beauty, now I understand what is 'to see a man's heart after a long time'."

**the original phrase is '日久见人心了'. The 日久 means 'long time', however, it also sounds like a profanity that would mean 'long fuck', making the sentence to the dirty mind seem like 'to see a man's heart after a long fuck'.*

Gu Yun: "..."

A group of vigorous men in the army, some of whom came from Hanlin origin and could be presented before the Emperor, some of whom were ordinary martial artists who did not know a single word before enlistment, everyone had different tastes. Joking with each other in a playful way in private, there were often some vulgar remarks - some of which were normal sentences, but when rearranged by them, they could also attract countless crude meanings.

Gu Yun bit back: "Why are you so low?"

Shen Yi was stunned at first. He then carefully reexamined his last careless remark and was convinced that Gu Yun was truly helpless, he shouted, "You are the one who is low!"

Chang Geng was talking to Uncle Wang at the door when he heard the roar inside. He looked back and saw General Shen shouting, he then asked, "Is there any loquat tea sent from the palace left? Remember to bring a bowl for General Shen later, I'm afraid he will ruin his throat from shouting."

Gu Yun sat on the side with his legs crossed, grabbing the small

yellow croaker in the oil-paper bag to eat and waited for Shen Yi's anger to fade, he suddenly said, "Alright, Ji Ping, I know you're upset. Although it's all the orders of your parents, making promises and arrangement, but if you do not like it, there is no need to care about whose daughter it is? Although the Shen family relations are complicated, can they manage people from the Black Iron Camp?"

Shen Yi was bewildered for a moment, his face became depressed. "I am not afraid, just..."

Gu Yun nodded his head. Growing up together as the sons of noble families, they understood each other's difficulties full well without a need to speak them aloud.

"When I was very young, I heard my aunt and grandmother talking about my father, saying how useless he was, how he was not well-versed in either martial arts or literary, all day sitting idly in the Imperial Board of Astronomy, hanging around with a group of monks."

Shen Yi sighed, "My father's generation only have three people, first uncle is disabled, his career path is difficult, and my father is the idling type. In those years, the Shen's family weight all depended on third uncle to support.

"That year, I resigned from Hanlin to enter Ling Shu Institute. When my grandfather knew, he almost fainted, wanting to expel me from the house. It was father and uncle who had protected me till the end, bearing the name of having no filial piety. At that time, even the family laws had been brought out. My grandfather's hand slipped, in order to protect me, my uncle took a whip. He was already exhausted mentally, his physical condition was not good, he had vomited blood on the spot from grandfather's hit. Since then, his health went from bad to worse, he had passed away before thirty-five years old. This is why I made up my mind and joined the army with you."

For guilt, for not having to go home and... To earn a reputation for themselves, to show the family whose eyes were above their heads.

When it came to noble families, people watching from the

outside would more or less see how they eat and dress well, worthy of admiration and envy. Only the people inside would know of the countless helplessness.

"Sometimes it just feels too unreasonable," Shen Yi said. "Too unreasonable. Several times going through life and death situation, earning a name for yourself, but returning home and opening the curtain, the attitude awaiting you were still the same. Unless I sever all familial ties and get out of the house, I'll always be dominated by these tangled relationships... Well, I only complained to you a few words, don't take it to heart. It's not a big deal. Compared with your family, mine is only trivial matter."

Gu Yun laughed and said, "It's all idle talk."

"Isn't it?" Shen Yi laughed at himself. "Did you see the paper of General Zhong? In addition to the military situation, it also details the desolate state of the victims in Jiangbei. It is still summer now, what would happen when autumn came? If they could not be settled down, there was no telling how they would live, eat today, worry about tomorrow. Only those of us from the upper class would sit around being sorrowful about trivial family problems."

After he had finished, he sighed quietly, the two were silent for a moment. Gu Yun suddenly said, "Tomorrow, show me General Zhong's paper. If the time is right, I will present it on the court, I have had enough listening to those people quarreling."

Shen Yi was stunned. The attitude of the Marquis of Order fully represented the military. For so many years, he had never had any input towards the internal affairs. This time he intended to stand behind the Grand Council...*Yan Wang*?

At this moment, Chang Geng came in unknowingly and interrupted, "There is no need, yifu, these are small matters, no need for you to come out in person."

When Shen Yi saw him coming, he abandoned the improper position and suddenly sat up straight. "Your Highness is working hard for the people who live in the world. We, the soldiers who will only spend money but do not know how to earn money, also want to do

our best to help, no matter how trivial our strength is."

Chang Geng laughed: "What is General Shen saying, the generals bathed in blood so that we could breathe and fall back. The matter of the factories along the canal involved many branches, if you all interfere, it could easily cause more troubles. I can resolve it, rest assured that the people can settle down well before the winter comes."

Today's *Yan Wang* was no longer an ignorant teenager at Yanhui town. There must be someone who carried the beam when the country was in danger. Although he was young, his calm dignity when leading the Grand Council was shown clearly. A few sentences that sounded like a casual chatter, through his mouth, there seemed to be a strong sense of logic.

Shen Yi suddenly remembered that since *Yan Wang* took over the Grand Council, whether they asked for money or rations, they received it all, batches of machines and armor were sent to the front line without delay. If they had not come from the capital, knowing full well how the court had holes all over, they would wonder why they were even better off compared to before the war.

Shen Yi put his hands together: "In any case, in place of tens of thousands of generals in the frontier, I must express my gratitude to Your Highness."

Chang Geng laughed and said, "What is General Shen saying. Besides, yifu has already expressed his thanks, hasn't he?

Gu Yun: "..."

This little bastard!

Chang Geng pulled the oil-paper bag from his hand and said softly, "Just eat a few bites as a snack, you must know how to restrain. There will be dinner later."

Shen Yi, a single man for thousands of years, was uncomfortable sitting here. This time, there was no need for Gu Yun to shoo him away. He also wanted to run off after dinner. The food at the

Marquis's manor was truly painful to eat.

In the evening, General Shen, who had suffered severe physical and mental damage, was sent away. Chang Geng finally took the cup that Gu Yun was holding without letting go.

Gu Yun laughed lazily and said, "No more wine, just an empty cup. Let me smell it for a while."

Chang Geng threw him a pack of tranquilizer: "Smell this if you like."

Gu Yun shook his head helplessly. He would usually indulge, but if he wanted to control himself, he would also be absolute serious. He had not drank for many days and only had three or two cups as Shen Yi was here, basically only enough to moisten his lips and throat, aware that Chang Geng wanted to manage him, he did not put the cup down.

Chang Geng truly liked to manage him and take care of everything, he would never borrow another's hands either, as if by doing this, it could make him feel at ease.

It's all trivial matters. Gu Yun was also very happy to indulge him in silence.

They bathed cleanly and went back to their room, but no beautiful scene happened. Gu Yun patted the bedside and said to Chang Geng, "Bring me the silver needles."

On that day, Chang Geng had suffered both extreme shock and sorrow, almost falling into hallucination. Then, his many years of long-cherished wishes came true, his heart was overjoyed, his whole body was in a state of ecstasy and madness. Gu Yun had said nothing

of it and held back at that time. Two days after Shen Yi and the others arrived in the capital, he went to find Chen Qing Xu.

Miss Chen came for a check up once, then began to perform acupuncture on *Yan Wang*, who had double pupils appearing from time to time, making him into a hedgehog. She said with deep meaning, "From ancient times, there was a saying that too much joy will transform into sorrow. It is not uncommon for even normal people to turn mad from extreme happiness. With His Highness's condition, it would be better to have some restraints."

After that, she also looked at Gu Yun obscurely, as if the word 'animal' had flashed between the lines, shooting towards and onto the Marquis of Order's head.

She issued a dozen of prohibitions — no alcohol, no spicy food, no arguments and no sex, instructing him to use needles to stabilize his mind every night before bed. Some places where she could not reach, she could only let Gu Yun do her work for her. Gu Yun studied with Miss Chen for several days. Fortunately, as he learned martial arts from childhood, he managed to correctly find all the acupoints.

Chang Geng laid still on his stomach on the bed, unfastened Gu Yun's hair bun, grabbed a strand of loose hair lock in his hand to play with, handed his back for the amateur man Gu Yun, not afraid that he would made a mistake.

No matter how exhausted he was physically and mentally every day, this moment was when his heart relaxed the most. He wished that it could go on like this until the end of time.

Chapter 83: Counterattack

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"Zi Xi, what you have given me, do not take it back from me."

—

Gu Yun knew nothing about the technique of acupuncture, he only followed Miss Chen's teaching step for step. He had heard the exaggerated rumor that one wrong needle could paralyze a patient, therefore, he dared not be the slightest bit careless, down to the depth of each pin. It was truly quite hard for his blind eyes.

Only until the last needle was put in place that Gu Yun let out a sigh of relief, a thin layer of sweat had broken out on his body. He wiped his hands with the towel beside him. When he turned around, Chang Geng was watching him without blinking, with his head tilted to the side. The blood hue and double pupils in his eyes were gone, his gaze was quiet and distant, reflecting a glimmer of the steam lamp, resembling a pair of flames inside the oil lamp lit under the ancient Buddha.

Gu Yun: "What are you looking at?"

Chang Geng stiffly lifted the corner of his lips. With the silver needles on his body, his face was sealed up in a state of paralysis, unable to laugh.

Gu Yun's eyes wandered across his smooth back with beautiful curves. Although he truly wanted to 'take revenge', he dared not violate the doctor's orders and touch him at this moment. He coughed and said, "Alright, stop smiling, hurry and take a rest. Don't you have

to get up early tomorrow?"

"Zi Xi," Chang Geng's face could not use many muscles, his words could only be said in a hushed gentle tone, sounding even more like acting spoiled, "Can you give me a kiss?"

Gu Yun gave him a warning glance: "Are you looking for trouble? Already become a hedgehog but still seducing me."

Chang Geng had seen already him through, only the word 'yifu' was enough to make him admit defeat. The honest gentleman hidden under the layer of an improper man would not touch even his finger when he was stuck with all these needles. Thus he looked at Gu Yun without fear, only smiling - the corners of his mouth could not be lifted up, but his eyes were full of laughter.

Gu Yun thought: *"Climbed all the way to my head already."*

However, Gu Yun was not an old monk after all. When he saw the young man's naked broad shoulders and narrow waist, body like jade, his scattered black hair resembling satin, black and white in clear cut, he could not avoid feeling moved, hence he had to sit with his eyes closed to rest.

After a short while, he could hear a rustling sound coming from the side. Gu Yun opened his eyes and saw Chang Geng climb up like a corpse. He first touched his lips, then gently held his lips between his own and nibbled, his thick eyelashes shaking slightly, in sharp contrast to his stiff expression of being sealed by needles.

Gu Yun wanted to push him away, but Chang Geng's body was covered in needles, there was no place to do so. Before he could act, Chang Geng had pushed him onto the bed.

The man he loved was plunging on him in a half-naked state and hair scattered all over. Gu Yun's throat moved. He felt that he was about to transform into iron from enduring for a hundred years. He angrily patted the royal buttocks of His Highness *Yan Wang*: "The needles are still on, are you going crazy again!"

Chang Geng leaned over him, his chin placed on Gu Yun's neck

and murmured, "I'm all right. That day when I thought about you being in my arms, I always felt that I still haven't woken up. I never had any good dreams after many years, I was always afraid that as the beginning is happy, later I would be struck by demons. I somewhat scared myself and caused nightmares."

Gu Yun looked up at the bed curtain, thought about it, and asked, "What would you usually see in nightmares?"

He did not know whether Chang Geng heard him or not. He only looked at him and did not answer, his lips hovered over his cheek, giving him a peck after a few moments.

Gu Yun stretched out his hand to block it: "Stop clinging to me, you can ignite the fire, but you don't care to extinguish it."

Chang Geng sighed. For the first time, he did not want to listen to the doctor's advice at all.

Even so, he did not stop bothering him and said in a low voice, "You look so good in formal clothes."

Gu Yun picked a needle-free area to hold him lazily. "What do I wear that doesn't look good on me?"

He was already a little sleepy. Because Chang Geng did not sleep well, the room always burned the tranquilizer. Whether it could tranquilize Chang Geng or not, this was difficult to say, only knowing that Gu Yun, the fish that was affected by the pond, was feeling sleepy earlier and earlier.

He was ambushed by the people of the Western Regions. For a while, the old wounds kept recurring. After half a year, although they had become better, he could feel for himself that his spirit was much worse than before.

When he was on the front line, he still had a string tensed up in his heart. Now as he had returned to the court and did not need to be in a ready state every day, the string was slowly loosened, he often had a kind of exhaustion that was unable to dissipate. At this time, although not spoken for long, his eyes were already closed in a haze.

Chang Geng immensely loved this bold shamelessness of his, he laughed a few times in a low voice: "It would be nice if it is only for me to see, formal clothes only for me to see, armor only for me to see, casual clothes was also for me, nobody has the right to desire you..."

His words were half-truth, half-joking. Gu Yun, who had closed his eyes, assumed it was only playful, flirtatious words whispered in bed. He laughed and replied, "I'm afraid that's not possible, but wearing nothing, on the other hand, is only for you to see."

Chang Geng's eyes instantly changed. Several silver needles erected from the back of his hand to the wrist could not stop him from moving his hands up slowly and began to touch all over, to the point of waking Gu Yun up.

Gu Yun had to avoid the silver needles on the back of his wrist and hand, pressed Chang Geng back and said sleepily, "Don't make any ruckus. Do you want to get more needles?"

Just then, the window lattice was tapped gently from outside.

Gu Yun's eyes were sleepy. "Hmm? I'll get it."

He put Chang Geng away lightly and pushed open the window. A dirty wooden bird flew in and fell into his hand. The wooden bird was very old. A sandalwood scent had soaked through it deeply, slightly penetrating Gu Yun's dog nose.

Gu Yun returned and handed the wooden bird to Chang Geng. "Is this the bald donkey's? Where did he run off to again?"

Hu Guo Temple had been cleansed by Li Feng, the position of the head monk was intended to be given to Liao Ran for his successful rescue, but he refused to accept it at all cost, only hanging this name in the temple and continued to traveled all over the world living as an ascetic monk.

"He is helping the refugees settle down in Jiangbei." Chang Geng did not get up very easily. "Sometimes among the common people, a monk's talk is better than officials."

He opened the wooden bird as he spoke, took out the letter of Liao Ran and looked at it once. The lingering smile on his face gradually disappeared. For a while, he sighed slightly and put the letter aside.

Gu Yun took it and swept over: "Jiangbei had an epidemic, how come I had not heard anything about it?"

"The climate over there is hot and humid, and there are many dead people. If we can't deal with it in time, it's not uncommon for an epidemic to occur... Last year, the canal valley was renovated. I assigned those people the task of settling the refugees to place into their achievements. Bastards, they even learned to hide things."

Chang Geng whispered as he sat beside the bed, his soul seemed to be fixed in his body by several silver needles, appearing very exhausted and dull. His eyes fell on the corner of the bed. The headlamp of the bed threw a large shadow over his nose and spread it on his face that had become much thinner. "I thought after adjusting, it would stay clean for two years, then I will think of something after fighting through these two years, I did not expect that it would be this way..."

If it hadn't rotted to the root, he was afraid it would not have produced such bold and courageous local officials resembling hooligans.

Gu Yun saw that he was not at all surprised by it, he asked, "You already know this?"

Chang Geng was silent for a moment. "Zi Xi, help me to get the needles down. It's better now."

Many people were exhausted, many people were losing their lives, but the court continued to argue.

Gu Yun removed the silver needle from his body fluently, picked up a thin robe from the side and draped it around Chang Geng. He put his hand around Chang Geng's waist and said, "Don't think about it. Get a good night's sleep. If there's any difficulty, do tell me. You must not shoulder it alone."

Not knowing which nerve of Chang Geng was provoked by this remark, suddenly, he turned to Gu Yun and said, "You will help me with anything?"

Gu Yun thought about it and said, "Except for things that are above the proper laws and orders. If you want the stars, I will not give you the moon. Even if it is rainy or cloudy, I will still put up a ladder to the sky to pick them for you. Alright?"

At the end of the sentence, he seemed to have a little hint of teasing, but this time Chang Geng did not laugh. Maybe the body that was just sealed had not been fully relaxed, maybe he was able to hear the hidden meaning of Gu Yun's words.

Gu Yun kissed him gently at the ear: "Come here, lie down."

Chang Geng, however, turned back and grasped Gu Yun's chin. His expression that was once as calm as a sea of stars and dust suddenly broke out a storm, dispelling the usual gentle outer layer. His cheeks were pale, his eyes incredibly dark, blue veins jumped violently on the back of his hands, concealing the power of ancient evil gods in legend.

It was not until Gu Yun frowned that the strength of Chang Geng's fingertips suddenly loosened. He stared at Gu Yun with an indescribable expression for a moment. "Zi Xi, what you have given me, do not take it back from me."

Gu Yun agreed and calmly answered, "Alright, the Manor's salary is given to you, but can you give me one or two pieces of silver as pocket money every month?"

Chang Geng heard him answer just for the sake of it, his expression grew dim, but Gu Yun laughed and hugged him, rolling him into the bed: "I will not leave you, I swear to God - how is your suspicion so severe? Sleep fast, I'm feeling sleepy to death already."

Chang Geng did not let it go, "Even if I really..."

"Even if you're crazy, I will not leave you." Gu Yun pillowed himself on his crouched arm, patting Chang Geng's body lightly,

consciously or unconsciously, and closed his eyes. "If you dare to go out and hurt people, I'll break your leg and tie you up in the house, watching you all day and all night. Satisfied now? Already in the middle of the night, you still want to be scolded..."

What he said was not any good words, but Chang Geng's breathing became erratic, his eyes suddenly lit up and wished he could swallow the person in front of him. But he suddenly remembered the doctor's advice. Still knowing his boundary, he dared not venture further with the Bone of Impurity. He only stared at Gu Yun for a moment, and finally reluctantly laid back.

Chang Geng closed his eyes and imagined the scene of what he had just heard. His entire body tightened. He wished Gu Yun could really break his legs and shut him up in a room - even if it was a small and dark room, he would never complain.

He tossed and turned for a moment, and finally, he could not help but reach out and grab Gu Yun's wrist. "You said it, if I'm crazy, you can lock me up, or if you want to go ahead of me in the future, you can give me a bottle of *He Ding Hong**. After sending you off, I will end my own life...Ah!"

**Red Crown of Crane, a poison akin to arsenic*

Gu Yun raised his hand and slapped him on the buttock. This time it was not a loving caress, but with real strength, hot and painful.

Gu Yun: "Ending my foot. Shut up, if you won't sleep then get out."

Yan Wang who started talking nonsense as soon as the needle was taken off was finally smacked to obedience and shut up. When Gu Yun's consciousness slipped away, he was still worrying. He's afraid Chang Geng's 'ending his own life' sentence was something he could keeps to his words and committed. He did not know whether it was his nature or the Bone of Impurity was changing him subtly. Although Chang Geng tried hard to hide it, Gu Yun could feel the stubbornness and intense temperament in his heart day by day.

It would be dangerous to go on like this.

Emperor Long An's grand court was held once every ten days. But in the recent extraordinary period, many things have not been resolved, thus it had changed to every day. The court's civil and military officers have to wake up at the fifth period and go to bed at midnight. However, the Grand Council had to arrive more than half an hour earlier than all the other officers.

The next day when Gu Yun was awakened by Huo Dan, Chang Geng had already left first, but it did not wake Gu Yun up at all. He did not know whether his movements were too light or whether Gu Yun slept too deeply.

"Put that thing out," Gu Yun rubbed his temple and pointed to the incense burner. "I'm about to be smoked by that thing to the point of being unable to wake up."

Huo Dan put out the incense burner according to his words, he said: "Marshal, this is just an ordinary sleep and tranquility fragrance. There is no problem for everyone else, but how come when used on you, it was as if you were sedated? You can't blame the incense burner. You are tired everyday, there is an obvious deficient in both qi and blood. You are still young, it is not good to go on like this."

"Shh," Gu Yun said to him with a low voice and signaled with his eyes "I'll go and ask Miss Chen to prescribe for me. Don't be too lengthy about this to others, do you hear me?"

Commander Huo paid attention to 'military commands are as heavy as mountains', and immediately responded: "Roger!"

At the same time, he thought in his heart, *"The Marquis told me to not to be lengthy, but he did not tell me neither to run my mouth nor to*

shut up. I have to think about it carefully and allocate the right opportunity to report it secretly and reasonably."

On that day, it was already hostile as soon as the court started. As expected, several families joined hands to bring up the paper Jiang Chong had copied and showed Chang Geng the night before. Then the officer of the Ministry of Housing, Lu Chang, step forward, using harsh words to accuse the head of the Ministry of Works who had recommended thirteen merchants to dip their hands in *Ziliujin* matter as 'showing his true intent'. The two groups of people almost tore each other apart in the hall in front of everyone, the Emperor angrily shouted for them to stop.

Fang Qin stood on the side to watch, assessing the Emperor's unsightly expression in his spare time. He made a signal with his eyes towards his own party, knowing he had stabbed the Emperor where it hurts.

Sure enough, Li Feng took a breath, pinched his temple and said slowly, "Let's take a long look on this matter, I think the private sale of *Ziliujin* is still not very proper, what does the Grand Council think?"

Jiang Chong came out and said, "Your Majesty, all the masters of the Grand Council came here early this morning to discuss this matter. Our worries accidentally coincide with Officer Lu. We all think it is not alright to sell *Ziliujin* to civilians and businessmen."

These words stunned everyone. Fang Qin hesitantly looked at *Yan Wang*. Suddenly, he was unsure which side this mysterious Prince was on, neither did he know what kind of play he will be performing today.

Li Feng had good impression with Jiang Chong, a pure minister

who had been promoted by his own hands. He also felt that what he had said was quite to his opinion. He waved his hand to signal that he could continue to speak.

Jiang Chong: "However, the disaster of refugees is imminent. There are many bandits in the Central Plains of Sichuan. Even if the Marquis of Order killed one Huo Long, there may still be 'Shui Long' and 'Feng Long' hidden among the people waiting to raise up. As long as it is profitable, they will emerge in endlessly. The refugees are good civilians today. But if they cannot survive, they will fall into the ranks of bandits tomorrow. At present, there will be military disasters in all directions. If we continue to fight internally, not mentioning resting, will we not make those foreign enemies laugh when they see it? What's more, some time ago, your subject also heard of the outbreak of a plague in Jiangbei. If this is true, it will be even worse..."

**Shui Long - water dragon, Feng Long - wind dragon*

Before he had finished, the court outburst.

Li Feng's eyes blackened: "Plague? What plague?

Fang Qin who was idling was stunned as he heard this, he looked up at Officer Lu with unbelievable eyes, who was just now still aggressively threatening people.

Last year, a large number of officials along the canal were pulled down by *Yan Wang*. Every big family was busy planting their people inside. The governor of Liangjiang was Officer Lu's brother-in-law. This generation of Lu family was not very outstanding, but they had the advantage of being in-laws with the entire court. Consort Lu was the birth mother of the first son of the Emperor, they had a deep foundation. But Fang Qin would never expect that they would be this bold!

In Great Liang Dynasty, when the Emperor was far away, it was common to either conceal or to exaggerate the disaster situation in case of catastrophe. The first reason was for the sake of the official's own reputation and achievements, the second was for the sake of deceiving the country and to take little bit more of resources sent out

for disaster relief.

At present, the country was poor and weak, assuming that they would not manage to get any scrap and fearing that the epidemic would be serious enough to implicate them. In addition, Lu family thought of themselves as smart, fearing that the Emperor would be too worried about the people's livelihood and ended up following the wishes of the businessmen, thus the news of the plague was deliberately withheld.

Fang Qin immediately understood everything in this mess. He angrily glared at the surname Lu, wishing he could grit his teeth until they bled. Why didn't they think that paper could not contain the fire? *Yan Wang* unexpectedly patrolled the canal coast last year, it had only been a few months since? The head of the last man in charge hadn't even rotted into a skeleton yet!

Emperor Long An himself was industrious, thrifty, and hardworking. What he despised the most was corruption. *Yan Wang* was also an odd ball who did not form any party or harbored selfish intention. The Lu family truly was trying to find death under the eyes of those two people.

If failure was only inches away, it would all be because of the hindering of these people who thought of themselves as smart!

Li Feng said angrily, "Subject Jiang, quickly elaborate on this!"

Chang Geng unhurriedly went out of the line and said, "Your Majesty, your brother liked to copy sutras and rituals of Buddhas in leisure time, I had a very good personal relationship with Master Liao Ran. When Master Liao Ran resigned from the post of Hu Guo Temple, he went south to Jiangbei to help settle the refugees. Because he has no status and position, it was inconvenient to disturb the local officials, thus he only went around, preaching the teaching and raising some donation money from the local rich families to relieve the urgent need.

"Recently, the master sent a private letter to me, telling me that the disaster was serious, asking me to think of a solution as soon as possible. However, Jiangbei's severe epidemic mentioned in the

letter, your subject had never heard of it before. The letter had just been received, the actual situation had not been verified yet. Master Jiang was quick to mention it from feeling restless, Royal Brother please pardon him."

As *Yan Wang* spoke, he casted a look untainted by the dust of mortal world towards Officer Lu, then as if intentionally or unintentionally, his eyes glanced over to Minister Fang whose expression had turned green.

Li Feng took a deep breath and said, "Six departments and nine ministers, a crucial Grand Council, yet no one had heard any news,... it was thanks to an ascetic monk in ragged clothes to leak the news, if it is true..."

He was silent for a long time and gritted his teeth: "I, on the other hand, did not know who was the one intending to cover the sky with one hand in this court!"

The officers in the hall all knelt down at once.

Chapter 84: Undercurrents

*Sorry for the delayed update, someone just finished all four endings of Sekiro *looks at Emi* ^^*

—

If they could drag Yan Wang into the water, it would be two birds with one stone.

—

Officer Lu's back was covered with cold sweat, his body frozen from fear.

Fang Qin sighed in his heart, *"These types that can not be promoted."* He slowly said, "Your subject first asks Your Majesty to cease your anger, I feel that the matter may not be as serious as what the Master said. Jiangbei is hot and humid, the summer is difficult to endure, the refugees are weak and are prone to sickness. It is not unusual to have a few cases of fever, not necessarily a true epidemic. Your Majesty, think about it, if someone really has the ability to cover the sky, why can they stop everyone, but can not stop Master Liao Ran from sending a letter back to the capital?"

Chang Geng listened without raising his head, and when he heard this, he smiled lightly and said, "I do not understand what Master Fang meant to say. You're saying that Master Liao Ran can not tell what is an epidemic and what is a fever? Or is it that the monk is bold enough to plot against a powerful minister? Or was it that this Prince caused a ruckus for no reason, falsely forging evidence with the intention of eliminating those who do not follow me?"

Fang Qin hastily stepped back. "Your Majesty bear witness, Your subject absolutely dare not."

As soon as Li Feng frowned, Chang Geng put his hands together: "I am still young, I can be a bit quick tempered. Master Fang do not take it to heart."

“On the fifteenth day of every month, Master Liao Ran always lit an incense and prays for blessings. He will hand-draw a peace token and seal it in a brocade pouch to send it to me at a station, wishing for such things as national prosperity and good health for Royal Brother. The peace token after being sealed will not be opened at will, as Royal Brother also knows. But recently, several peace tokens I received have traces of being dismantled then put back together again, I don't know who couldn't bear to look at your brother's little wish..."

Fang Qin was choked up by his words.

Chang Geng took an envelope out of his bosom, it was not the same one Gu Yun had seen the night before, but an old stack of paper. There was no telling how long they were kept for, they had wide width, after arranging and gluing, they came together once again. Each paper had a string of meaningless ink marks. However, when put side by side with each other, a complete sentence could be seen under the complicated pattern. Together, they said, *"The epidemic in Jiangbei is grave. Dead people are everywhere. The stations were blocked off. I hope the court will soon have a resolution."*

Chang Geng: "Each sentence is divided into four pieces of paper, sent out in disorder, covered up with Sanskrit and totem texture."

Emperor Long An recognized the handwriting of Liao Ran.

Fang Qin was about to open his mouth, but Chang Geng cut off what he was going to say.

Chang Geng: "But honestly as Lord Fang said, after all, this thing is obtained through improper channels, and there are doubts as to whether it is true or not. This is why your brother did not report it immediately. I intended to talk about this today and would like to ask Royal Brother to allow me to travel to Jiangbei to check the situation of the refugees, to help them settle down, and also to verify whether this is true or not. It's just that Master Jiang was a bit eager and spoke of it too soon."

Jiang Chong knew how to read the situation, he quickly bowed: "Your Majesty, pardon me."

As soon as this remark was made, the meaning of *Yan Wang* filled everyone present with goose bumps, Fang Qin's head tensed up — *Yan Wang* was going south!

"Law does not blame the masses" was meaningless when it came to *Yan Wang*. Last time, the feat of killing all the way from south to north was still vivid. He seemed to not be afraid of not having anyone left to work in the court, nor did he care about making enemies with thousands of people. Resolute in killing, not forming any party, and no respect for anyone. No matter what, he was the Emperor's blood brother. As long as he didn't rebel, no one would be able to touch him.

The Fang family once wanted to get closer to *Yan Wang*, but every time, he had blocked them off with neither light nor harsh attitude.

If one wanted to give a gift to *Yan Wang*, send it to him today, on the next, special anti-counterfeiting Feng Huo tickets printed by Ling Shu Institute would be delivered to their door. He did not want wealth, did not need beauty. Some people have sent beautiful women; they were returned the next day. If he truly could not return them, they would be thrown over to *Yan Wang* Manor to clean the yard — the Manor was only an empty shell. Ever since its establishment, *Yan Wang* had never went back there to spend the night.

In his eyes, the daughter of the Fang family, who countless people had broken the threshold coming to ask for her hand in marriage, was nothing. At first, some people yearned for the first prince-consort position left vacant, trying all their might to enter the inner palace. Who would have expected that later, no one knew what medicine the Emperor had taken, even the Empress was scolded because of this matter. The original saying was ‘ignorant woman please stop dipping your hands into matters of the court’ — it seemed he truly wanted to indulge his younger brother in being alone for the rest of his life. For a moment, nobody dared to mention it anymore.

Fang Qin read the situation incredibly quick, his voice changed and immediately said, "Your Majesty, Your subject heard that many gangsters blended among the refugees in Jiangbei, causing troubles

every day. That place was also close to the front line, there are foreigners preying like tigers. His Highness is of very high status. Moreover, the Grand Council could not leave His Highness for even a day. White dragon disguised as fish in such a chaotic place, I am afraid it would be too risky."

Li Feng frowned and turned to Chang Geng:, "Sending people to check is good enough already, should you personally deal with everything, is that proper?"

On one hand, he appreciated Chang Geng's indifference, grasping on tightly once he had determined his goal, not taking even the King of Heaven in his eyes. He felt that this person would be useful, but was not too calculating as to make people feel uneasy. On the other hand, Chang Geng was his only brother. Even as they did not grow up together, having little affection, at the time of the collapse of the country, Li Feng had no choice but to reluctantly place this small familial affection on Chang Geng.

But besides relief, Emperor Long An also felt headache. *Yan Wang*'s demeanor was usually gentle, considerate and not arrogant. But it was not the same when doing business. He dared to throw his Shang Fang sword back to him when the soldiers surrounded the city. Now, as he was in charge of the Grand Council, no matter who was in his hands, he would not acknowledge them.

Li Feng: "No need to talk about this anymore."

Chang Geng: "My brother, there are a lot of people in Jiangbei, in all directions. We don't know what the exact situation is. We haven't even spared them a look, only talking about how to settle them in the court. Isn't that the same as talking strategy only on paper? Each officer here has their own reasons, no one can come up with a solution. It's better for your brother to travel there and report back to Your Majesty."

The corner of Li Feng's eyes twitched. At that moment, Gu Yun, who had always been a wallflower, came out slowly and leisurely, "Since *Yan Wang* has the heart, Your Majesty should agree to it. If corrupt officials run rampant in Jiangbei, others may not be able to withstand their weight. If you do not feel assured, your subject can

escort him along the way. Is it not just a number of vagrants and bandits? They need not be taken into account."

Chang Geng was stunned by his sudden appearance, they had not arranged this beforehand.

Shen Yi peeked at Gu Yun secretly, and Gu Yun took advantage of his lowered head to send a glance at him. It was improper no matter how he looked at it. Shen Yi turned away as if his tooth ached, feeling that the adulterer in the story would have the same face.

If these words were to come from someone else, it would seem arrogant and unreliable, but coming from Gu Yun's mouth, it was incomparably absolute.

Gu Yun thought about it, then added a ready-made excuse: "The land of Jiangnan must be recovered. Your subject also wanted to explore the front line. These few days I had intended to request for a decree to travel there. I can escort His Highness *Yan Wang* on the way, I promise I will bring him back to you safely."

As soon as the Marquis of Order stepped out, there was no need to argue any longer.

The next day, Li Feng ordered that *Yan Wang* would be the chief inspector. Xu Ling, the right deputy inspector of the Inspectorate, will be his assistant, thoroughly investigating the case of the hidden epidemic in Jiangbei, the Marquis of Order would escort them along the way. They would also be accompanied by Ge Chen, a member of the Ling Shu Institute, to assess the equipments of the Westerner Army in Jiangnan.

After the meeting, Fang Qin was in fact, very irritated, but his heart was too deep to show in front of people. He sat in the carriage with a gloomy face. He was brilliant in literary, used to be praised by

the former emperor and had excellent wits about him. He was able to lift the name of Fang family in Great Liang as a non-eldest son. Even the thorn-covered *Yan Wang* would show a pleasant expression when meeting him. People would always praise him, yet everyday, he had to work with the likes of Lu Chang and other cowards.

People said ‘a righteous man is without any party’, but people also said the word ‘power’ and ‘advantage’ were inseparable. Without power, there was no advantage. But without advantage, where would power come from?

From the school grounds to the hall before the Emperor, who would not want to build their own career, leaving behind a grand story? If he didn't have the surname Fang, he would undoubtedly join forces under *Yan Wang*, fixing up this rotten and broken court.

Unfortunately, people could not choose their own origin. For the first thirty years, being sheltered by their families, getting whatever what they want, for the next thirty years, they must give their best for the family, being trapped to death because of the family ——

Suddenly, the carriage stopped abruptly, and the family servant outside whispered, "Sir, Lord Lu stopped the carriage, wanting to say a few words to you."

Fang Qin's face went cold, wished that surname Lu could die quicker. He sat stiffly for a moment without expression, Minister Fang then reverted his face back to the usual pleasant look. He raised the curtain and half-truthfully, half-falsely scolded, "Ignorant dog servant, hurry and invite him here, why are you still reporting?"

The family servants were already accustomed to bearing the bad names for their master. Their pretenses of fear and panic were as good as real. They invited an irritating Lu Cheng onto the carriage, driving back to Officer Lu's place.

Lu Chang's body was covered in cold sweat. As he entered the door, he fell down and worshipped, "Minister Fang please save my life!"

Fang Qin laughed in his heart, but on the outside, he feigned

being shocked while helping him up, pretended to be oblivious, he said: "What is Brother Yan Nian doing?"

Lu Chang, of course, knew that the surname Fang was only pretending, but as it came to this, he could only hold on tightly to his savior, it was not convenient to be concerned about his attitude. He quickly and meticulously confessed about his brother-in-law, the current Governor of Jiangbei, Yang Rong Gui, who was bold enough to cover up the epidemic in the area, who cleaned up the local forces, put all the 'dissidents' who dared to oppose and betray him into prison, even sent people to block off the post station, assassinated eighteen people who were on their way to report his wrongdoings to the imperial court, forging this as a deed from vagrants and bandits whose greed inflated as they saw money. Fang Qin's heart and lungs trembled greatly as he listened. He had now come to know too many things.

Lu Chang cried out: "Minister Fang, the reason this official did not report, it was not because of family, but it was for our grand plan. You see, the Emperor rushed for a cure, even something that humiliated the ancestors such as the Feng Huo tickets have been sent out. If he knows that Jiangbei has come to this, coupled with the Grand Council pouring oil into the midst, he will really follow the intention of those cheap businessmen, letting them build their factories!"

Fang Qin looked at Lu's runny nose and tears, feeling that this man was truly despicable, he thought to himself: *"Bullshit!"*

On the surface, he sighed with worry, "Are you confused ah Yan Nian, remember when Zhang Feng Han of the Ling Shu Institute went mad and asked the Emperor to lift the *Ziliujin* ban for the people and had his papers returned by *Yan Wang*? Although he always mixes up with those Confucians, have you forgotten his surname? His surname is Li. How can the Li family allow a group of private businessmen to sell *Ziliujin*? *Yan Wang* did not intend to use those businessmen to do anything. He clearly knew what your brother-in-law had done. He took this as a lead to pour it all on us."

Lu Chang was speechless and could only cry. There was no good look about him in the first place, right now he appeared all the more

disgusting. Despite Fang Qin's obstruction, he knelt down again and bowed his head like pounding garlic and said, "Master, please save me."

Fang Qin did not want to save his life, only wanting him to die early, he then stalled: "There is Marquis Gu beside *Yan Wang*. A word from the Marquis of Order can transfer the entire garrisons of General Zhong in Jiangbei, can they not clear up a few government offices? Yan Nian, it's not that I ignore the ones in need, but there is nothing I could do!"

After that, as if in pain, he covered his face with his sleeve, choking up: "I still remember Master Yang and I were of the same school, sharing the bond of being classmate, traveling the lake with joy. Now we are both officials in different places, he suffered, how could I not want to save him?"

Lu Chang: "..."

He came here seeking help, yet ended up making the other cry, it was quite amazing. Fang Qin truly lived up to his name of being a master manipulator behind the scenes.

Lu Chang gritted his teeth inside, but speaking with a dejected face: "Sir Fang, once this matter spreads broader, it will be a great crime that is punishable by the execution of nine generations. Our families have deep connections, the bones break still involved the tendons, you can not ignore this."

Fang Qin's face twitched fiercely, Lu Chang's remark had poked him in his weak point.

Fang Qin had a half-sister from the same father, born by 'connected chamber*' and did not receive much love. Even in her teens, she did not talk much to her older brothers, but this Lady Fang had once committed a grave deed when she was still young — she attempted to run away from home with another man, but it failed.

**'connected chamber' is a term referred to the female servant of highest status in a family, she could be considered to be a concubine, but rank-wise, she would only be a bit higher than an ordinary servant. In order to*

make it convenient to serve her master at night, her room would be connected to her master's.

In fact, after the opening of the sea route, the era of rituals and music had collapsed for many years. If this were to happen in the eastern coast where the folks were open-minded, it would be nothing much. At most, there would only be a few remarks from the idlying bunch, perhaps someone would even praise her for having courage at a young age - there were many foreign women showing their backs on the street and no one would have any opinions.

But this had happened in the Fang family.

Since Yuan He Dynasty and after, a kind of custom gradually formed in the court. The more open the people are, the more conservative noble families become. It seemed that if they did not, they would not be able to reflect their noble and dignified bloodline. This matter had once caused the Fang's family great humiliation, they intended to lock her up then send her directly to a temple to be a monk in a few years. Unexpectedly, the Lu family was currently wanting to use connection to climb the ranks. Overjoyed by this opportunity, they hurriedly charged in like flies encountering feces. At last, a cousin of Lu Chang who used money to buy position married Miss Fang.

In the capital, there were only a handful of powerful families. Marrying back and forth, everyone had somewhat of a connection with one another. It could be said that whether it be blessing or disaster, they must bear it together.

Lu Chang's words were a reminder, but also a threat.

Fang Qin stopped crying and straightened up slowly. He looked at Lu Chang for a moment and thought to himself, *"A small officer in a district would dare to threaten me. This man cannot stay."*

"Master Lu, please stand up," Fang Qin pondered for a moment and said slowly, "I still keep to my words, this is useless no matter who you seek for help. If you want a turnaround, you should start with His Highness *Yan Wang*."

Lu Chang saw that they had returned to the starting point again. His face was morphed into a bitter gourd: "But that..."

Fang Qin put up a hand to cut off his words, poured out a little water from teapot on the small table, and lowered his voice "What kind of person is *Yan Wang*? The whole national treasury passes through his hands, would he care about your meager gifts? Moreover, some men are good-natured and prefer cleanliness. They don't want those miscellaneous people to be close to them. It's not uncommon for them to not favor beauty, What's more, those commonplace women you've collected are not beautiful either. Even I feel that they are eyesores, let alone *Yan Wang*?"

Lu Chang: "Then..."

Dipping in tea, Fang Qin slowly wrote the four words ‘donning the royal robe’* on the table, giving Lu Chang a meaningful look, who was still stunned then stretched out his hand to erase the handwriting on the table.

**an idiom that means*
'be acclaimed as an Emperor'

Lu Chang was staring with wide eyes and his tongue was tied for a long time. He fell down onto the seat next to him, his lips trembling a few times. "Master Fang, doing this, this is…"

Fang Qin sneered and said, "What? Then what are you intending to do? Killing *Yan Wang* on his way like killing those people who did not have the power to even tie down chickens? Do you really think the Marquis of Order who stood silently on the side in the court all day long was only a flower vase for decoration? Or do you really think that your brother-in-law can cover the sky with one hand and let the imperial officials return empty-handed? If that's the case, how did that wicked monk's letter climb all the way to the Grand Council? The current Emperor can not contain even one tiny dust in his eyes. Remember back when they turned on each other, even the Marquis of Order was imprisoned. Do you think he will be lenient with the Lu family — with those of us?"

After an incense time, Lu Chang who had seemingly lost his soul

stepped out of Fang Qin's carriage and wandered into the Lu Manor like a ghost.

Fang Qin told the coachman, "Return to our house."

He indifferently lit an incense in the carriage, as if wanting to disperse Lu Chang's scent from all around — to let some people know that in this world, even if there was a common interest, one could not arbitrarily manipulate others either.

The smoke was overflowing in the carriage. Fang Qin sat with his eyes closed and thought: if they could drag *Yan Wang* into the water, it would be two birds with one stone.

Even if Yan Wang really was selfless, with no ill intent in his heart, not even putting the jade seal in his eyes, then this time, if he could not be overthrown, he still had another killer move in his hands.

Yan Wang's tactics were heartless, stubborn, and hardheaded, hiding his talents and wits in front of others, appearing only as a loyal official. However, in retrospect, every step it took for Great Liang to come to this stage, his shadow stood behind every single one of them.

If such a person could not stand side by side with them, he would become a strong enemy. Even if he was a Prince, there was only one option...

Chapter 85: Large Eagle

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Ruthlessness could be a consolation, but sentiment of love could be a vile hindrance.

—

After telling Jiang Chong and the others to tend to his various affairs during his journey south, Chang Geng finally returned to the manor before sunset. Gu Yun was beginning to direct the servant to pack their luggage, while he himself was sitting idly on the railings of the courtyard, playing with the white jade flute that Chang Geng gave him, occasionally bringing it to his lips to play a soul-crushing tune.

... If Chang Geng had any regrets at this time, he would regret giving Gu Yun a flute with holes. If he knew about this sooner, he would have made it a solid stick for him to hold for fun.

Seeing Chang Geng coming back from afar, Gu Yun waved at him and said, "Chang Geng, come here, I'll play you a piece."

Chang Geng, fearing that he would be really doing it, strode forward, grabbed Gu Yun on the railing and pulled him down. He said to his ear, "Save your mouth to do something else."

Gu Yun: "..."

He found that those who kept company with a wolf would learn to howl — Chang Geng was becoming more and more like him.

They walked to the inner courtyard together, Chang Geng asked, "Why did you suddenly say you want to travel to Jiangbei's frontline on the court today? I was frightened."

Gu Yun set his hand behind his back, rubbed the white jade flute

back and forth at the fingertips. He said with a little smile on his lips: "I have not wanted to stay in the capital for a long while now. Everyday soaking in this miasma, the frontline is much better."

Chang Geng laughed and said, "Are you going for entertainment?"

"Mm, for entertainment," Gu Yun said, "but also because I am worried about you."

Chang Geng was stunned, the smile on his lips gradually disappeared. For a moment, he knew Gu Yun's casual words of 'worried about you' meant he was worried about taking a bunch of scholars to charge into the area filled with refugees near the frontline, but a strange idea still uncontrollably arose from the bottom of his heart.

A voice in Chang Geng's heart said, *"Why is he worried about me? Is he afraid that I will do something? Or is he afraid that I will join hands with Old Zhong's garrison in Jiangbei to force the Emperor to abdicate?"*

Gu Yun saw his footsteps stop suddenly, he looked back at him in confusion, "What's the matter?"

When Chang Geng met his calm eyes, he took a deep breath, stretched out his hand and rubbed his eyebrows, thinking to himself, *"Where are your thoughts running to? Are you crazy?"*

Gu Yun used to be his comfort... Thinking about it now, this consolation stopped at the moment of overflowing sentiment. Since the moment when Gu Yun looked back at him, it was no longer the case.

Ruthlessness could be a consolation, but sentiment of love could be a vile hindrance.

There would be love, desire, fragrance and taste, greed from day after day, there would be jealousy and sorrow, there would be fear of losing...

Seven emotions and spirit turned mad, six senses buried in the mortal world.

Chang Geng chased after him with a sense of panic and held Gu Yun's hand, as if only by holding it in his hand could his heart be put at ease. Gu Yun raised his long eyebrows, but did not pay it much mind. He opened his palm for Chang Geng to place his hand inside.

In the hot summer, the general's hands were nowhere near warm. Only a little warmth in his palm, all given to Chang Geng.

Just then, Uncle Wang was coming over quickly and saw the two men in the courtyard pulling and pushing. He immediately bowed his head with an odd expression and reported, "Marquis sir, His Highness the Crown Prince had arrived."

"Ah?" Gu Yun was surprised. "Please invite him in."

A moment later, the eight-year-old Prince pedaled a pair of short legs and ran towards Gu Yun. The manor was too big, yet His little Highness refused to be held by others in order to maintain dignity. When he came in front of Gu Yun, the top of his nose already had a layer of sweat.

As soon as he entered the courtyard, he caught a glimpse of Chang Geng. He stopped jogging immediately and walked with casual steps. At first, he intended to open his mouth to call 'granduncle', but remembered that it seemed that Gu Yun was not fond of hearing this title, he then put his hands together and greeted like an adult: "Marshal Gu. Fourth Uncle."

Gu Yun squatted down and said to him, "Why did Your Highness come out of the palace at such a late hour?"

"I heard from my father that Marshal Gu would follow Fourth Uncle to the south, I came to see him and Marshal Gu off specially," the little prince spoke properly, but forgot his words halfway through. After pondering for a while, his ears flushed red, yet his face assumed a calm and self-assured appearance, he then continued, "I wish you a safe journey to Jiangbei and an early return!"

Gu Yun laughed as he listened. The little prince stole a look at him. He was not at all angry about being made fun of, clumsily pulling out two safety tokens and gave each to Gu Yun and Chang

Geng.

Gu Yun teased him, "What else does Your Highness wish to instruct after you have done sending us off?"

At first, the little prince was too embarrassed to mention it, but after a moment of being unable to hold back, he cautiously pulled Gu Yun's clothes. "I also wanted to ask for Marshal Gu's handwriting. Royal Father said that back then he also had Grand… Marshal Gu's note for practicing."

Gu Yun saw that the boy was incredibly adorable. Without saying anything else, he bent down to pick up the little prince, writing a note for him directly in his study. The little prince made the servants store it carefully in a box and ran back to the palace with excitement.

After the prince was sent off with the proper courtesy, Chang Geng then said, "That year the former Emperor used me as a chess piece to tie you down, is Li Feng now using the same technique to restore his relationship with you by using the prince?"

Gu Yun laughed and said, "What are you saying? Are you jealous of even children?"

Chang Geng looked at him with a smile, and suddenly said, "My yifu is unfair. He never held my hand to teach me how to write each stroke."

Gu Yun: "..."

Who was the one that imitated his handwriting so seamlessly so that even He Rong Hui of the Black Iron Camp was completely deceived?

Gu Yun: "Are you eight years old too?"

Chang Geng stabbed him calmly in the heart with his words: "When I was eight years old, nobody was there to teach me. Hu Ge Er would only take the stick that had just been taken out of the stove..."

"All right, all right," Gu Yun hurriedly said, "I will make it up for

you now, alright?"

As Gu Yun spoke, he gave the pen from just now to Chang Geng, holding his hand from behind, putting his other hand on the table and lowered his eyes slightly. After thinking about it, he held Chang Geng's hand to write a character 'Min' in Kai style on the paper.

**"Min" here is the Min from Chang Geng's name, Li Min.*

Chang Geng was covered in the faint fragrance of medicines of Gu Yun's body. He took a deep breath in silence: "Writing one word is not enough. I used to copy sutras when I was in Hu Guo Temple."

"..." Gu Yun shook his hand off. "Forget it, are you trying to exhaust me to death?"

Without saying a word, Chang Geng only stared at him motionlessly. After a moment, Gu Yun truly admitted defeat and placed his chin on Chang Geng's shoulder, wrapped his left arm around his waist and half leaned on him, stroke by stroke copying that damn lengthy sutra. He felt that this man had become more and more spoiled in recent days and could hardly be managed anymore.

Three days later, under the escort of Gu Yun and twenty guards, Yan Wang, the chief inspector, and Xu Ling, the deputy inspector, left the capital with Ge Chen of Ling Shu Institute.

Xu Ling was a Tan Hua* appointed by Li Feng in the first year of Long An. His appearance was as good as his name, with beautiful facial features, his face appearing as if it was covered by powder. If it was not for the murderous guards of the Marquis of Order that destroyed the atmosphere, the deputy inspector and Yan Wang standing together resembled two young master brothers traveling with each other.

**探花, third place in the national civil examinations*

After leaving the Nine Gates, Gu Yun took the group of people directly to the Northern Camp. Xu Ling was only a scholar, yet he

was not that afraid when standing in front of the legendary black iron weapon Gu Yun. He asked frankly, "Marquis sir, what are we coming to the Northern Camp for?"

Gu Yun laughed and said, "To change horses."

The journey had many dangers up ahead. Inspector Xu had made ready to witness the devastation of territories and facing the local corrupt officials. Even if he was accompanied by the Marquis of Order, it did not increase his sense of security. Especially when he found that the Marquis was in a very joyous mood, as if he was not going into a tiger's den but going for an outing.

As Xu Ling was still in a confusion, Ge Chen had already entered the Northern Camp with familiarity. After Ge Chen was accepted as a pupil of Master Feng Han, he gradually took over military equipment preparation from his hands. He often came to the Northern Camp to run errands and gradually became a familiar face.

Ge Chen lead the group into the armor and machine storage in the camp with ease: "Your Highness, Master Xu, this way, please."

Just then, Xu Ling was shocked.

There was only one Kite on the flat ground, about the same size as the Red Kite at that time, but its skin was much simpler than the Red Kite. There were no such complicated carved pillars and railings resembling a flower boat, there was only an iron shell in dark grey.

The Kite rested quietly in its original place, one could not find a flaming wing on either side. Instead, the four bases were equipped with rows of ventilation piles, which were as thick as an iron muzzle. The lines were smooth to the point of almost graceful, appearing like an Eagle Armor enlarged innumerable times.

Xu Ling cannot used any word to describe it aside from 'perfection', he said in awe, "What is this?"

Ge Chen proudly introduced: "It was not yet named, there was only this one in the entirety of Great Liang, we tried to equip the power mechanism of the Eagle Armor on the Kite, failing many times

before succeeding. This thing can transport people, but also moves faster than the Giant Kite which only goes step by step."

“But it is not yet perfected. The entire court only has this one. It consumes a lot of fuel and can not hold many things. This is the first time we are using it outside of test flights. When we can solve the problem of fuel consumption, this air combat vehicle will be able to bomb those foreigners back to their home in a moment. My Teacher said that if it could be implemented in the army, you might as well call it a 'Large Eagle’.”

Xu Ling gave an unbelievable look towards Chang Geng, who was not at all surprised. His Royal Highness Yan Wang had soon planned to clean up the worms in Jiangbei? Even something used in place of traveling on foot that could travel a thousand miles a day was ready!

"We will go directly to Jiangbei's frontline," Chang Geng said. "The Marquis has already informed Old Zhong, we will leave this thing in the frontline garrison, then try to disguise to go from the south to the north. The posts from the south to the north must have been waiting for us, why must we walk straight into them? How about it? Would Master Xu dare to ride in this aerial combat vehicle no one had ever touched before?"

Xu Ling's family was poor, and he disdained kneeling and worshiping the nobles, he did not associate with businessmen either. Although he was a child prodigy with outstanding talent, how many times did he have to make way for those who traded money for power? The great talent of that year now had to spend years wasted in the court — how could he not harbor disdain?

Previously, there were rumors in the court that the last time *Yan Wang* adjusted the canal coast, it seemed to be harsh, but in fact, it only gave the big families a chance to place their own people inside. This time, Xu Ling went along with *Yan Wang*, he knew that the local officials in Jiangbei had a deep foundation and their forces were intertwined. It was not that he did not feel anxious, but he was afraid that investigating until the end, he would not know who he was making a wedding robe for*.

**this phrase is a reference to the last line of the classical poem Poor Girl by Qin Taoyu. The poem tells of a very talented but poor girl who wants to wear a proper dress but can only make wedding robes for other rich families. The same as Xu Ling, who feels bitter to have no opportunity to show his talent due to his social status. The phrase basically says Xu Ling was still unsure before which powerful party was he siding with by investigating.*

Only now could he somewhat feel that *Yan Wang* truly wanted to act against them. With his heart surging, he responded with a loud voice: "Eating royal salary, how could I dare to retreat in the face of danger? Your Highness, please!"

That year when Gu Yun flew from the northwest to Jiangnan with an Eagle Armor, it only took about two or three days. This air combat vehicle was larger, it would still be slower than the Black Eagle. However, it was not slower by much either. It took two and a half days from the capital to the front line of Jiangbei. At this time, the news of *Yan Wang*'s departure had not yet even reached those with ill intentions.

Right after they left, some people in the capital also began to make their move.

Emperor Long An favored hard work and thriftiness. Since the war came to a critical stage, the air in the whole capital was very tense. Compared to the national funeral, it was even quieter. All singing and dancing entertainments were stopped. Nobody wanted to touch the moulds of Emperor Long An at this time. More than a dozen public pavilions* were closed, even a place for fooling around was hard to find.

**they meant brothels here*

With Gu Yun gone, Shen Yi had one less place to drink and chat every day, having nowhere to go, wishing he could just stay for longer in the barracks.

At first, it truly was peaceful. Who knew that after two days of hiding, the Shen family had sent people to take him back.

Shen Yi had no choice but to go with the servants and return home like going to the execution ground. Before he could come in, the parrot that Old Shen hung at the door, opened its mouth and said to him, "The two-legged animal is back, the two-legged animal is back!"

Shen Yi picked up a grain husk and bounced it on the bird's head: "Shut up, flat-peak hairy animal."

The bird was very angry at being beaten, it screamed and scolded: "Little hairless animal! You are the Sang Men star* hairless animal!"

*丧门星，*refers to people who brought disasters and misfortune*

Shen Yi was stunned, handing the reins to his family servant. He had not heard the words 'Sang Men star' for a long time. He could not help turning his head and asked, "Who is visiting our family?"

The servant answered, "General, Third Madam came with Young Master Hui, they were talking to Old Master inside."

Shen Yi's heart suddenly had an ominous foreboding. Third Madam was his Third Uncle's wife. Because of him, his uncle had died young, leaving only an orphan child and a widow mother at home. His cousin Shen Hui grew up weak and sick, along with his loose lifestyle as an adult, not doing anything from day to night, always mixing up with women. His face bore the appearance of kidney deficiency from excessive indulgence.

Although Master Shen had always feel ashamed towards his sister-in-law, his aunt has placed the early death of his Third Uncle on Shen Yi's head. The two families have not interacted for a long time. Shen Yi still remembered the woman in mourning attire pointing at him and scolding that he was a 'Sang Men star', he asked with curiosity: "Why is Aunt coming here?"

Servant: "This... this servant does not know either, but I saw that Third Madam brought forward a lot of gifts, even acted with much politeness after entering the doors. Perhaps she only wants to visit relatives, there is nothing bad."

Shen Yi responded with an 'Ah' and went in with a heavy heart, he could see his Third Aunt and cousin were both here. The beautiful widow from that year had grown old. Third Madam have prominent cheekbones, jaw sharp as a knife. Shen Hui was in worse condition, with black circles and eye bags that could droop to his feet. His whole body was an empty shell of pointed-mouthed and monkey's cheek. He gave a flattering smile as soon as he saw Shen Yi, making one feel uncomfortable.

Before Shen Yi could finish greeting, Third Madam had already stood up, the handkerchief in her hands rolled up into a ball. She laughed and said, "I haven't seen Ji Ping for many years, you have made such a great success. The governor of the Southwest, a big official in the frontier, your future and career is sure to be limitless."

"As a mother myself, I'm not as hard-hearted as your father. If I had known better, I would have kicked this good-for-nothing brother of yours out of the house and let him wander wherever, it won't have to come to this."

Shen Yi did not know what she meant, he stayed politely silent.

Third Aunt seemed to be afraid of him. After reluctantly greeting him with enthusiasm, she only sat aside and did not dare to look at him. In a few words, Shen Yi understood what Third Aunt meant.

Turned out his cousin Shen Hui had caused trouble. Shen Hui was incompetent in both martial arts and literary, even after buying himself a meager official position, he still ended up skipping work. Later, Emperor Long An explicitly forbade officials from entering and leaving places for ‘entertainment’, yet there were those who had not taken it to heart. Not daring to enter a public brothel, he gathered his friends to seek out prostitutes.

It would have not been much if he were only eating meat, yet after a few bowls of wine, he ended up in a fight with someone because of jealousy, causing a large enough ruckus that even the chief magistrate of the capital heard about the news.

The whole country was under a gloomy cloud, yet these people were still in the mood to commit such a thing. The chief magistrate

immediately threw all the scoundrels that ruined their families who participated in the fight in jail. They were the children of powerful families; with only a bit of bribes and connections, they could get out with no problems. Who would have expected that they were just in time with Emperor Long An currently rectifying society, it was the same with placing their heads into the muzzle.

After listening, Shen Yi drew his lips straight and thought to himself, "If Shen Hui were my son, I would have beaten him to death a long time ago, would I allow him to run outside and humiliate the family like this?"

The Third Madam wiped her tears and said, "For the sake of this animal, I had begged and pleaded everyone, seeking help from all the relations that I have. Later, a best friend of mine who was married to Lord Lu of the Ministry of Criminal Justice whom I knew in my early years, she had come out to say a few good words for this animal, that was how I am able to save him."

Shen Hui was sitting on the side eating melon seeds with indifference, as if it was not him who had caused this disaster.

Shen Yi did not speak up for a while. Although he came from the background of noble family, he seldom interacted with these people. He was not able to remember who was whose wife and who was whose in-laws for a moment.

Master Shen continued her words for him, "If that's the case, we should go to their door and express our thanks properly."

"That's right," said Third Madam in high spirits, "The next day I personally prepared a generous gift to thank Master Lu, who knows that their family not only refused the gift, but also politely saying that it was a trivial matter, thinking of it as creating a good affinity with our Shen family, we may even become relatives — only now did I realize that to be able to receive such high regard, it was thanks to our General's glory."

Shen Yi took one look at her and another at his old father, he was somewhat unable to smile, his voice stiff, "Why is aunt saying this?"

Shen Yi ventured the battlefields, even if his scholarly aura was heavy, he could not help but be stained with a destructive air. As he lifted his cold face, Third Madam could not help but fidget, struggling to avert her gaze as if she could not look straight at him, she beat around the bush.

"Didn't second brother said you were arranging a marriage for the General recently? The General did not know, the younger sister of my best friend was the concubine of Lord Lu from the Ministry of Housing."

"Lord Lu's daughter is an educated girl, with both beauty and talents, she had soon have a good reputation in the capital. When our general relieved the siege of the capital, that girl had fallen for the general — who does not love a grand hero? It's just that our general has countless things to attend to and has little contact with civil officers. The young girl was also thin-skinned and did not dare to come inquire about it, thus they have asked me to put in words."

T/N: if anyone is confused by the relationships, the focus point here is that Third Madam was trying to pair Shen Yi with the daughter of Lu Cheng, the crying man from last chapter.

Chapter 86: Uninhabited

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The capital was filled with restless people.

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Half an hour later, Shen Yi excused that he had something to do in the evening at the Northern Camp and would not eat at home, leaving only Old Master Shen at home. For the whole day, besides chanting sutras and taking walks with his bird, he did not know anything regarding the court or the inner palace, it was not convenient for him to keep his brother's widow here for dinner, thus the pair of mother and child bid their farewell and left.

As soon as the two came to the door, they heard the guardian of Shen Manor speak again. The big hairy god looked at the small carriage of Third Madam and fluttered its wings, "Prostitute walking the lame dog, shameless!"

Shen Hui's face turned black on the spot, and Shen Yi, who was enduring to see off the guests, rubbed his nose and hid a little smile from the corner of his mouth.

He always thought the bird's mouth was filthy and annoying. He should have pulled it down, plucking its feathers and stew it some day. Unexpectedly, who would have thought it could be so brave in front of foreign enemies. He was so comforted that he decided he would make some rice and wine for it another day.

But on the surface, Shen Yi had to explain, "This animal hangs at the door all day long, it teases anyone that passes by. It even learns crude words from the streets, cousin, don't take this animal to heart."

Shen Hui, a black sheep of the family who was hollowed out by wine and indulgence, dared not become angry with the governor of the Southwest. He laughed dryly as if in pain and ran away.

Shen Yi watched the mother and son go far, then his face sank. He stood at the door for a moment and reached out to touch the tail of the parrot. He muttered, "I have heard of poor people can't afford to eat selling their children for food, but have you ever seen someone running to the General's manor to buy the general?"

The parrot did not distinguish between ally and enemy, it turned its head and gave him a mouthful. "Bah, stupid animal! Cannot even mend your own pants!"

Shen Yi: "..."

Let's stew it.

He laughed at himself and turned back inside. Master Shen waved at him from far away with his cane. "Ji Ping, come here. I have a few words to say to you."

Due to having outsiders here, Shen Yi was not able to get angry. At this time, he came closer with his features twisted, saying to Master Shen, "The Lu family is those that gave birth to the Royal Consort, I can't afford to marry one of them. You can go marry them yourself, don't mention Third Uncle's kindness or anything of that sort, even if you want to repay a favor, you cannot ask someone to use their own life to pay."

Master Shen was silent for a moment and said slowly, "You have been despised by both cats and dogs since you were a child, your father had not expected you to be able to rise to such a high price, I could also feel proud."

"..." Shen Yi choked for a moment and said angrily, "You know nothing. Just quietly take walks with your bird and stop interfering with my business!"

"Although I'm already getting old, I still know a little about the outside world," said Master Shen gently. "Starting with Emperor Wu's dynasty, he had been especially afraid of civil and military officials becoming in-laws. I heard about grand generals with troops in their hands marrying princesses, but marrying daughters of noble families — that is rare. Not mentioning you, but even Marshal Gu, they have

only just got engaged, didn't the bride already die before marriage?"

His old man talked like a singing opera, with a drawn out long tone. Shen Yi's eyelids twitched. He always felt that his tune contained an abundant amount of implications.

Master Shen ignored him, he shook his head and sighed, "Since the siege of the capital city, the Emperor was forced to return the Black Tiger Emblem to Marshal Gu. Nowadays, there are so many people in this world who don't put the Son of Heaven in their eyes anymore."

How did Gu Yun got involved in this?

Shen Yi thought about it for a moment, he was able to see some meaning in it. Since the Westerners besieged the city, Li Feng was forced to return the general power to Gu Yun first, then the *Ziliujin* hidden by the royal family for several generations in Jinghua pavilion was burnt down by the Westerners.

Even now the dilemmas on four sides remain unsolved. Emperor Long An's powerlessness was seeping out bit by bit, Li Feng himself must be aware of it as well. Otherwise, with his damn personality, how could he take the initiative to repair the awkward relationship with Gu Yun?

"Yesterday, when I watched the stars, I saw Tan Lang's light overwhelm Zi Wei*, the sea of stars were dim, the panic in people's hearts are like wild grass, the deer had gone down to the Central Plains*. I fear that chaotic times is about to begin..."

**Taken from the phrase 'deer came to Central Plains'. The word "deer" was often used to refer to the throne, the country.*

**Zi Wei star symbolizes the Emperor, Tan Lang star could also symbolize greed among other things, what Papa Shen saw could be interpreted that someone greedy wishes to overthrow the Emperor soon*

Shen Yi: "Dad, wasn't it cloudy last night?"

"Ignorant child," Master Shen did not look at him. "I ask you, what is the name of the current commander of the Imperial Guard?"

Shen Yi was stunned for a moment — the imperial army was filled with young masters, but according to the usual practice, although they also assessed qualifications, family history, the highest commander was generally someone with military merits transferred from the Black Iron camp.

However, when the capital was besieged, more than half of the elites of the imperial army and Han Qi, the former commander, had died in the western part of the capital. The 'birth family' Northern Camp was almost destroyed, the guards of the capital were badly injured, there was a shortage of talents.

Most of the remaining members of the imperial army were young masters type who was disdained by Han Qi that year, only staying at the base of the imperial city to complete the number. After this battle, these young masters all had military merits, their positions were raised with the rising tide*. For the first time, there was the highest Commander who had not been trained by the Black Iron Camp. He was a subordinate general under Han Qi, named Liu Chong Shan, and was the brother of Lu Chang's first wife.

**idiom that means "to change according to the situation"*

Shen Yi pondered for a long time before he could figure out the intricate relationship. His heart went cold. He took two steps forward, pressed down his voice and said to Master Shen, "Dad, one truly becomes wiser with age. Luckily you were here to give some advice. Just after Marshal Gu and Yan Wang left, the Lu family would do something like this, what are they thinking?"

Master Shen knocked his cane on the ground and hummed, "I only know how to walk my bird, I don't understand anything. Aren't you already grown up? What do you need advice for!"

Shen Yi was oppressed by Gu Yun every day. He had already developed a resilient temperament. He couldn't hear the cool words poured into his ears. He frowned for a moment and asked in a low voice, "He's only a small officer, how could he dare…"

"Small officer?" Master Shen looked up at him and said with a sneer, "General, Fang family is the teacher of half the court, Lu family

with their broad in-laws and relatives, it is very easy for them to crush one soldier in the countryside in a remote area. Do you believe it? Do you think your position of a ‘Southwest governor’ is anything grand?"

Shen Yi: "I don't believe it, there have been so many A Dou* Emperors since ancient times, yet nobody spent all day long trying to rebel, going against the Principle** like this..."

**A Dou is the son of Liu Bei, and an incompetent emperor.*

***纲常, [gāng cháng] the three cardinal guides (ruler-subject, father-child, wife-husband) and the five constant virtues as specified in the feudal ethical code.*

"*Yan Wang* had already left for the South, the Lu family will definitely make a move, would they be holding onto the Principle and wait for their entire family to be executed? Is the current Emperor an A Dou? Will he let anyone force him to abdicate?" As Master Shen said this, he hit Shen Yi's left leg with his cane. "Go this way, it's a dead end!"

Shen Yi instinctively shunned to the right side, Master Shen lifted his crane again, and firmly hit his right leg from the other side: "Go this way. As long as you dare to think and dare to do it, after a path to survival had been made, you can have immense authority — which step will you take?"

Shen Yi frowned: "They want to make use of *Yan Wang*..."

This thought was somewhat frightening. The imperial army had always been the Emperor's heart and soul. If the heart and soul of the Emperor turned against him, without any precautions, it would be too late to summon the Northern Camp to the rescue.

And once *Yan Wang* compromised, being pushed onto the throne by them, what would Gu Yun do?

Would he be lenient with these traitors who robbed the national power because of his own personal feelings? According to Shen Yi's understanding of him, Gu Yun definitely would not.

However, foreign enemies resembled preying tigers, half of the country had not been taken back. If Li Feng died, would Gu Yun fight against *Yang Wang* to return the power to the eight-year-old prince?

Shen Yi found that he dared not guarantee this.

... But no matter how Gu Yun chose, in this way, regardless of the kindness of father and son, the righteousness of friendships, or the selfish feelings of romance difficult to express to outsiders, it would all probably come to an end.

Shen Yi's mind was turning fast... No, he could think of this, how could *Yan Wang* not? As long as he really respected Gu Yun, *Yan Wang* would never...

Master Shen cut in and said, "How about this, write a letter, think of a reasonable excuse, then go to the Lu family personally to delay this marriage."

Shen Yi was shocked, "Rejecting is one thing, why delay? And if it is not to reject, why must I go there personally?"

Master Shen took a deep look at him, hummed, then ignored him all together.

A moment later, Shen Yi's astonished look faded slightly, and his face appeared shocked. His father's intention was for him to please both sides and not offend the Lu family at this key moment!

Shen Yi couldn't help raising his voice: "Dad, I have never done such a two-faced thing to anyone except the enemy in the border battlefield. If I want to marry someone, I will go out and find someone to arrange dowry. If I don't want to, I will reject them. I cannot put up a false pretense like this. What kind of person would I be then? Do you really think a lowly bunch can take down *Yan Wang*?"

Master Shen stopped and turned his back to Shen Yi. "Since *Yan Wang* entered the Grand Council, he first solved the shortage of the national treasury, then escorted the military supplies, pushed Black Iron Camp into the old nest of the Western Regions with one hand,

stabilizing four sides, he had many achievements, but do you know what is in his mind?"

Shen Yi angrily said, "*Yan Wang* had never formed a party to plot private affairs and harbor personal ambitions. He only wanted to return peace to the world then be together…then retire from the court. He is still in his youth, is it easy to be this dedicated? Yet behind him still exist groups of presumptive old fools like you. You are simply...absolutely unreasonable!"

"Did I step on your tail?" Master Shen sneered, "With what *Yan Wang* has achieved until this day, does he still need to form a party? Loads of people are willing to follow him! Do you know what it is called 'three men make a tiger'?"

"The first type is the new people who took office with the help of a Feng Huo ticket and the reform of administration. The second are the ones who truly want to bring peace to the country, doing something for the people - and the third type, the third type, is those who he had offended."

"These people are all the same at the root of it all. The first two wished nothing more than to push him onto the throne, while the latter wish to push him onto the fire, they are willing to pour oil in the mix, watching him have his scheme revealed and be punished for rebelling! Use your head, except for the crime of rebellion, who would be able to touch a Prince?"

Shen Yi's lips moved yet he could not speak.

Master Shen: "Do you know what is called 'a dam broken by pressure'? Do you know what is called 'tree grown too high, the wind will destroy it'? People's hearts are not like a calm water surface. Three men make a tiger*. You said 'future' - will the emperor allow him to retire successfully in the future? Who on earth is the fool here!"

**refers to an individual's tendency to accept absurd information(tiger) as long as it is repeated by enough people(three men).*

Shen Yi appeared as if he had fallen into ice and snow for a

moment. He finally turned around, his face pale, and walked away without saying a word.

"What are you going to do?" Master Shen shouted.

Shen Yi answer without turning back: "Do what should be done! You can just go walk with your bird!"

The capital was filled with restless people.

At this time, Gu Yun and the others arrived at the Jiangbei frontline in secret, traveling at lightning speed, it was very satisfying. Unexpectedly, approaching the time of landing, there comes a problem — they came just in time to catch up with a tremendous thunderstorm. This air combat vehicle, in order to take into account the speed and fuel consumption, could not be too heavy — on cloudless days, it could travel a thousand miles, but when meeting with rain and wind, it was done for. The Large Eagle would then become a bald quail.

The whole Large Eagle was swept up and down by the wind at high altitude. Others could bear it, but Ge Chen, an important Ling Shu Institute member, fell down first. He was too airsick to climb up, Yan Wang wanted to relieve his symptoms by acupuncture. Who knew that when a needle had just plunged in, the Large Eagle suddenly tilted. He almost hit the foot of the bed, if Gu Yun did not quickly pull Ge Chen's collar, the needle that had just entered the acupoint would have pierced in directly.

Under the guidance of Ge Ling Shu on his last breath, a group of soldiers had to revise the established direction, bypass the stormy area, spinning around in one place.

Gu Yun's *Qian Li Yan* in his hand was covered by the heavy rain, unable to see anything, he had to command by mere sensation, "Down a little, down a little!"

Another thunderbolt split down and almost struck past the Large

Eagle. In the wind, the Large Eagle shuddered as if on its last leg. The whole thing tilted to one side. Gu Yun staggered and fell into Chang Geng's bosom. Chang Geng held him in his arm while grabbing the railing tightly with his other hand. His face was wet with the rain of Jiangnan.

Xu Ling grabbed a mast tightly beside him. He never wanted to go on air again in his life. He shivered and asked, "Marquis, can we still be alive to check those corrupt officials?"

"It's all right," Gu Yun laughed carelessly. "Master Xu can rest assured, everyone would have fallen off the Black Eagle at least several times. Don't panic. I'm here to make sure that no one will die."

Xu Ling: "..."

In the miserable wind and bitter rain, the soldier roared, "Fly ahead! Marshal, we can see the land! "

Xu Ling took a deep breath, and before he could recite *Amitabha Buddha*, he heard another guard shout, "Marshal, Ge Ling Shu said that there might be a problem on the right wing. We are leaning too much!"

Gu Yun: "Wh..."

Before the word '*what*' could be let out, he felt a warm sensation on his neck. It was Chang Geng who took the advantage while everyone was shouting and struggling with the Large Eagle to lick his neck.

Amidst the noise, Chang Geng whispered in his ear, "To die together* like this, it would not be so bad, wouldn't it?"

**What he said here meant to die together as lovers.*

Gu Yun: "..."

Yan Wang, who remained composed even when Mt. Tai collapsed, even in this situation, he was still in the mood to do such a thing. Gu Yun already admitted defeat. Suddenly, he felt that Master

Feng Han was right. His Highness did not know what it was to be anxious.

The guard roared, "It's landing. Hold on tightly... Be careful!"

Gu Yun only felt the darkness in front of his eyes. The Large Eagle fell to one side, tilted and plunged into the ground. The people on board almost got thrown out. Chang Geng rolled three times with Gu Yun in his arms and collided with a mast before stopping. He could hear the breaking noise. He grabbed Chang Geng's collar and threw him aside — the mast fell down and brushed past them dangerously.

The soldiers scattered around shouted in shock. Only then did Gu Yun find that he was entangled together with Chang Geng's hands and feet, appearing very shady. In front of outsiders, he hurriedly cover up the trace with a cough, then got up and looked around.

It was late at night, the Large Eagle was situated in a deserted rice fields. The shore could not be seen at a glance. It was strangely quiet — there were no houses or villages, no barking dogs and chickens, only a few quiet cries of summer insects could be heard ——

Gu Yun suddenly had an ominous feeling in his heart: "Where is this?"

A personal guard staggered up, still breathless: "Marshal, we were not careful, it seemed we had crossed the river."

Master Xu, who had not yet climbed up, stumbled and fell down again after hearing this.

They had landed on the enemy's territory!

Chang Geng turned his head and laughed at Gu Yun, "Marshal, we flew too far."

Gu Yun rubbed his nose in embarrassment. "Causing such a loud ruckus, hopefully it will not lead the Western soldiers here. Ask Xiao Ge, what should we do with his unreliable broken Eagle?"

The two guards began to dig out Ge Chen, who almost went to see the former Emperor. Ge Chen threw his arms and legs at the others beside him and said, "Nausea..."

"Don't vomit," Gu Yun took Ge Chen's collar and refused to let him bow, forcing it on, "Tell me first, can this toy be dismantled?"

Ge Chen: "..."

He had heard that in a year, there were more than three hundred days where General Shen wanted to strangle the Marquis of Order. At this moment, Ge Chen understood him.

In less than half of an incense time, the guards around the Marquis followed Ge of Ling Shu's instructions and broke down the power system of the Eagle into four pieces, carried by four people separately, leaving a pile of useless scrap copper and iron. Gu Yun poured a little *Ziliujin* into the barrel of the Eagle and took out the match: "I will count from one to three, run fast."

Xu Ling was in confusion when he saw *Yan Wang* make a gesture. Two guards, one on the left and one on the right, picked him off the ground, the group ran their fastest speed against the wind.

Then there was a loud *bang!* — thick flame and smoke almost exploded the rainy sky, blending in with the sound of thunder in the air, the earth was shaking.

Gu Yun had blown up the wreckage to dust!

Xu Ling's expression suddenly changed, he said, "Marquis, would it not invite the enemy troops here?"

"Nonsense, if we can't attract enemy troops, how are we supposed to go back?" Gu Yun spoke shamelessly, "Can you swim across the river? Master Xu, it will be alright, just follow me."

Master Xu could no longer believe him.

Chapter 87: Scholar

—

And the words 'Jiangnan defeated' have never been so powerful before.

—

Before, much like everyone else, Xu Ling placed an irrational trust in the Marquis of Order, the representation of the Black Iron Camp. It seemed that as long as there was Gu Yun, they could charge ahead whether it be dragon cave or tiger den, if the sky fell, he would be here to shoulder it. Of course, that trust was now shattered.

Deputy Inspector Xu's handsome face was pale blue, he still held onto the last line of hope and asked, "Marshal... is it also your intention to cross the river?"

"How is it possible?" Gu Yun looked at him with his gaze filled with confusion and said, "Tch, I already told Master Feng Han long ago that this thing is certainly not reliable. The reason why the Black Eagle can fly fast is that it could rely on human control when it reaches the sky. He makes such a large thing, it's alright in calm weather, in the face of a little storm and rain, it instantly comes down. Is it not to hand our lives to the enemy on the battlefield? You see, it's already done for."

Ge Chen threw up until his internal organs were turned upside down, his tears running: "I will... definitely tell Master Feng Han after returning."

Xu Ling's liver almost busted from fright. He could not be as optimistic as Ge Ling Shu, feeling that he could never return again.

Fortunately, someone could still speak human language, Chang Geng turned to Deputy Inspector Xu and said with a laugh, "Don't listen to him, he was only scaring you. This place is flat, there are no enemy camps that can be seen in sight. It shows that the enemy's leading force is not near at all. Tonight there are also thunderstorms

and rain, the sound of the explosion and thunder are blended together. He has calculated already, it won't attract a large number of people, at best, there will only be some patrol coming to check."

Gu Yun revealed an evil smile.

Xu Ling looked at *Yan Wang* with tears in his eyes. His Highness's courage and intellect that remained unfazed even in the face of danger was already enough for him to bow down in respect. At the moment, he sincerely said, "*Yan Wang* is wise."

"Not at all," Chang Geng waved his hand. "Being fooled by him since childhood, I had soon learned my lessons."

Xu Ling: "..."

He did not know why, but he felt that there was a... strange intimacy in the few words *Yan Wang* talked about Gu Yun.

It was not very pleasant to hide in the barren grassland in the rainy night. Fortunately, the Western patrolmen came quickly. A moment later, some people already came while cursing in foreign language. There was a slight trembling sound of horses hooves on the ground. Only then did Gu Yun, who was still playful and smiling, suddenly frowned and whispered, "Strange."

Xu Ling was startled as he saw his surprised reaction, he quickly asked, "Marshal? What's strange?"

"The people coming... Three, four, five... How come there are so little?" *Yan Wang* on one side lowered his voice and said, "The Westerners' patrol appears like a child play."

"I don't know," Gu Yun shook his head. "Let's deal with it first before anything else - does anybody know their language?"

He had just finished, but everyone's eyes already focused on Chang Geng in unison. He and twenty soldiers looked at each other for a moment. "What are you all looking at me for?"

Ge Chen was shocked, "*Yan Wang* does not know how to speak a foreign language?"

Chang Geng was puzzled: "... I can speak some Suzhou slang, but when did I ever know how to speak a foreign language?"

It turned out that over the past year, people have either thought that he was unpredictable, or that his heart was bottomless, or simply that he was a capable person, always assuming that no matter what he encountered, he should always have a solution, that he should know a little bit of everything.

At that moment, Deputy Inspector Xu on one side suddenly said, "This officer actually understands a little."

Only then did the eyes on *Yan Wang* shift collectively — plus *Yan Wang*'s own share.

Xu Ling coughed but did not show his timidity. He said, "To tell you the truth, when Marshal and Your Highness guarded the gate of the capital city, all the magistrates followed the Emperor up to the gate, this lowly official also joined in it, I could truly feel the uselessness of a scholar then. However, I was not well-versed in six skills, with no strength to kill the enemy, thus I have made up my mind to learn the language."

"If there was another fight in the future, even though I could not don the armor, I could follow behind to be a servant for the generals, running errands and speak the language, it could be considered that I have not been born into this body in vain."

The last sentence was almost prideful. In fact, besides Deputy Inspector Xu, in this group of people, they were either those with experience or a black crow of the Black Iron camp. One was cunning, one was sharp, one was fast, good at both risking their lives and taking lives. There were continuous dangers along the way. If it were to be someone else, they might have collapsed. It was difficult for the weak scholar Xu Ling, but bearing the thought of working for the people, he was able to grit his teeth and endure.

In this society with many types of people, there was a scholar between heaven and earth.

Even Gu Yun rubbed his chin, no longer teasing him.

"We will have to trouble Master Xu later," Gu Yun's playful eyes vanished, as if there was a glint of cold iron contained inside. "Here we go!"

With that, a group of Western patrolmen in Light Armor came into their sight. One man steps out from the group, circled around the fire and wreckage of the Eagle that had not been extinguished in the rainwater, muttering something.

Xu Ling whispered, "He said, '*It's raining so hard, it shouldn't have caught fire for no reason. There are no outsiders in this area. What happened?*'"

What did 'there are no outsiders in this area' mean?

Gu Yun just turned his head. Another foreign soldier picked up a burnt piece of debris from the ground and flipped it back and forth in his hand for a moment. Suddenly, he jumped three feet high and said something again.

Xu Ling hurriedly said, "He said, '*There's a sign of Great Liang's Military Factory on it, there must be Great Liang spies already mixed in*' — Marshal Gu, they're starting to get tense. Have we been found out?"

Wood could burn, but stone and iron could not. Those people must have recognized the sign of Ling Shu.

Xu Ling: "Marshal Gu, I'm afraid these foreigners will call..."

Gu Yun laid his hand on the Wind Slasher at his waist and gave Chang Geng sideways glance. Chang Geng took out *Qian Li Yan* that could be clipped to the nose bridge without hurry, wiping away the water on the glass. He touched the bowstring slightly, seemed as if he was determined whether it was damp or not, then pulled the bowstring under the wide-eyed gaze of Xu Ling.

Gu Yun waved his hand and more than twenty guards of Black Iron Camp flew through the grass.

A Western patrol soldier unloaded a horn-shaped trombone from his waist, took a deep breath, and as he was about to bring it to his

mouth to sound a warning, an iron arrow suddenly burst into the air, coming from his left ear, and shot the man's head into a rotten red and white watermelon.

His brain sprayed to all his companions nearby, and the next moment, a few dark shadows burst out in front of the Western soldiers not yet able to respond. The Wind Slasher chirped in the air, like chopping vegetables. In a twinkling of an eye, a few heads fell to the ground, leaving only one man who had not yet had time to dismount. He raised his hands in fright, looking in fear at the killers emerging suddenly from the wild grass.

Only then did Xu Ling manage to finish the sentence: "...for their companions."

Gu Yun patted him on the shoulder and sincerely answered, "Now they can't be called for anymore — pick him up, tie him up and take him along. It's not suitable to stay here for a long time, withdraw first!"

Two Black Iron Camp guards took the Western soldier, stripped him like garlic, and searched him. Then tied the Western soldier, who appeared like a white chicken, into a pig waiting to be slaughtered, stuffed his mouth and carried him away.

"I think there's a small village over there. Let's try it." Chang Geng said while walking, "Generally, in this land facing the river, during the war, those who can run had already run away. I'm afraid there are only a few old families left, nine out of ten houses would be empty. Later if we see people, let's ask the local what is the situation in the occupied area, but I have to ask Master Xu to go ahead first. The brothers of the Black Iron Camp would appear murderous when they're still and silent, so don't let them frighten the commoners."

Xu Ling hurriedly said, "Yes, as you command."

With that, he peeked at Chang Geng secretly. *Yang Wang* had been soaked by the rain. A strand of hair fell from his temples and was dripping with water. He was walking in the mud with deep and shallow steps in a deserted area, yet the look on his face seemed to remain unchanged and unconcerned, still carrying the bow that

shook the earth as soon as it was pulled.

Chang Geng accidentally raised his head and met Xu Ling's eyes. He asked pleasantly, "What does master Xu want to tell me?"

Xu Ling's face changed a little, but he finally swallowed the words raising to his lips and shook his head politely.

When the group came into the village, they discovered that the place was as quiet as a ghost town. Except for the sound of wind and rain and their respective footsteps, there was no other movement. Each broken wooden door was left half open, The grass in the yard grew as high as half the wall, everywhere were broken tiles and house posts. There was a baby's top hanging at the door of a house, stained with mud, already became a rag.

The most spacious part of the village was the ancestral temple. The courtyard could be seen from afar and could be used by outsiders.

Ge Chen took out a stick of the size of a small fire match from his bosom. After unscrewing the lid, a faint light came out. The bricks and tiles on the top of the ancestral temple had broken. As it was raining heavily outside, bits of water leaked inside. The tables, chairs, and benches in the room had collapsed and were damaged. There were only a few rags left on the corner of the wall, printed with the plain-colored flower pattern of Jiangnan, still reflecting the prosperity of the old days.

Xu Ling looked around inside and outside the temple and asked, "It seems nobody is here, Marshal, had the local people already run away?"

Gu Yun also frowned slightly, ordering several guards to search around and leaned over to pick up the printed cloth in the corner.

"The last time I went down to Jiangnan, it was in spring." Gu Yun said, "Flowers were blooming, warm winds gushed by, even rebelling is done in leisure, got some merchant ships filled with compressed fragrance to smuggle *Ziliujin*..."

Before he had finished, a soldier rushed in and said, "At the back of the ancestral temple, Marshal, you see, there's... in the backyard."

Gu Yun raised his eyebrows: "What's over there?"

The soldier's face flashed with hesitance for a moment, avoiding Gu Yun's eyes, he said with difficulty: "...the villagers."

The small village in Jiangnan was winding and graceful. There was a small river in the middle, houses were built along both sides. There was no distinction between North and South, but now they were all brought to ruin. The four stone signs of 'loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness' at the gate of the ancestral temple have been broken by a half. The stone pieces rolled into the grass. Xu Ling happened to kick something at his feet. When he looked down, he almost jumped up - it was a skeleton.

Xu Ling: "This... This..."

In the middle of the conversation, Yan Wang had taken the lead to enter the backyard of the ancestral temple. The real ancestor tablets were scattered all over the courtyard. The ruins of Buddhas were covered in dust. On the black slate, countless corpses with heads separated from their bodies were arranged neatly. Men, women, old and young alike, the deep hollow of the eye sockets of the skeletons were covered with cobwebs.

Xu Ling took in a cold breath and unconsciously grasped the door frame.

"It's a vast area," Chang Geng said in a low voice after a long silence. "There are open seas and canals between the north and the south. East and West official roads can go to the rest of the territory. There are many plains in this area, with a foreign enemy occupying for a long time, it is impossible to go on. Our people are also easy to get in, I think they... they had to do a thorough cleaning up."

Xu Ling asked in a daze, "What is a thorough cleaning?"

"Send Heavy Armors to slaughter the village," Chang Geng whispered. "Make a circle, group the people inside the circle together,

cleaning them all up, and don't let people from the outside come in again. Then just send people to block several main official road entrances and exits, so that there won't be thousands of Black Iron Camp soldiers mixed in under the disguise of merchants like what happened in the southwest that year. Now I finally understand why there are only a few soldiers on patrol just now."

"... Because this place is a no man's land." Chang Geng kicked the stomach of the Western captive as he spoke. The captive almost had his intestines leaked out from this kick containing his anger. Unable to scream, he had to groan on the ground like a pig.

Gu Yun took the light from Ge Chen's hand and illuminated a rotten wood, there was a line of inscriptions engraved by fingernail on it——

A guard asked, "What's that, Marshal?"

Gu Yun's throat moved slightly: "... '*The tears of the survivors are in the enemy's dust*'*... There's only half the sentence.."

There was a skeleton beneath the big wooden pillar, it had rotted into a mass, with patches of white bone, appearing very horrifying. Only an index finger eaten by insects and ants was still pointing at the inscription relentlessly.

As if it still questioned in silence: in the land of fish and rice, where are the generals and the iron horses?**

/: Referenced from the Southern Song dynasty poet Luyou* 陆游《秋夜將曉出籬門迎涼有感》 *(The feelings of traveling outside the fences during cold Autumn night), the original continuation after the first quoted line was "Hoping for the return of the Emperor's Army for another year."*

Soaking in the rain all night, the chill finally seeped through his bones.

And the words 'Jiangnan defeated' have never been so powerful before, the whole ancestral temple was engulfed in dead silence for a while.

Not knowing how long had passed, Chang Geng gently nudged

Gu Yun, "Don't look at it anymore, Zi Xi, many things could happen in the long night. Let's leave here first, it's important to join with Old Zhong."

Gu Yun's tightened his fist, straightened his back as he heard his voice. Unexpectedly, the front of his eyes darkened, tumbling for a half a step before he could stand still. Chang Geng supported his arm in fright.

Gu Yun's chest was uncomfortable. For a moment, he felt an indescribable sense of weakness that he had not felt for many years raising up. After being injured at the West gate, no matter whether he quit drinking or reduced his medication, he could not stop his body from becoming worse and worse, as if every debt from many years had come for him.

Now facing the questioning of a skeleton, he was not able to say a word, even a trace of nervousness and weakness was arising in his heart. Gu Yun thought, "*When can I take back Jiangnan? Could I still... make it in time?"*

However, many doubts and worries in Gu Yun's heart only occurred for a moment, they were then forced down — at least in the eyes of outsiders, he was back to normal.

"It's all right," Gu Yun looked at Chang Geng then pulled his arm out of Chang Geng's hand and said to Xu Ling, "Master Xu, ask the white-haired monkey where their old nest is, how many people, how many armors, where they are hiding steel armors. If each time we asked he does not answer, cut off one of his fingers, grill them up to a good meal for him."

It was said that most of the Western soldiers were purchased at the expense of money. There was no such thing as bravery and no fear of death. Gu Yun's many means of frightening him have not been used yet, the guard had just raised the Wind Slasher, he had already confessed everything.

As Chang Geng had said, the vast plains along the river have been cleared into a no man's land by them, leaving only one guarding station in each area. There were at least a dozen people in one post,

mostly cavalry.

"A part of the army acts as the vanguard, confronting General Zhong, and part of it is..." Xu Ling thinned his lips, struggling to translate, "... they raid everywhere and force prisoners to work as miners and slaves for them. The looted goods were transported back to their home countries, silencing those who wanted the Pope to step down."

At this time, the rainstorm had stopped, the thick clouds opened, revealing a small ray of moonlight. Looking far ahead, there was only thick smoke and mist, the scenery of farming puppets busy working on the field, farmers drinking tea discussing matters of the country were difficult to appear again.

Xu Ling whispered, "This officer thought that the refugees in Jiangbei were already in great distress, but at least they still had grass shacks to keep out the rain, and there were two bowls of porridge to receive every day..."

Chang Geng: "It's no use talking for longer. Let's go and let this western dog lead the way to their post."

The two guards of the Black Iron Camp immediately responded by picking up the Western soldier.

"Your Royal Highness *Yan Wang*!" Xu Ling took a few steps and called Chang Geng, "When can we fight with the Western dogs?"

Chang Geng kept on walking and answered without turning his head: "If we can successfully settle down many refugees in Jiangbei, pray that God will spare us of natural disasters, after resting for a year or two, until the Eighteen Tribes exhausted their resources, reopen the *Ziliujin* passage in northern frontier, I don't believe we cannot do anything to this group of Western dogs!"

Now the court was engulfed in dark smoke, it was difficult to even take a step, thousands of refugees were still wandering everywhere, let alone taking a rest? Uniting against the foreign enemy?

Xu Ling took in a breath, his eyes were red. He caught up with *Yan Wang* and whispered in his ear, "Your Highness, did you know that your movement in reforming the court was too big, some people had regarded you as a thorn in the eye... Not to mention anything else, but if that Yang Rong Gui truly is corrupted and is concealing information, he will surely catch wind of this these days. As a last resort, he can exchange all the gold and silver in his manor into *Feng Huo* tickets, saying that your Highness wanted to impose *Feng Huo* tickets on local officials by any means, imposing targets that are impossible to achieve, thus they are forced to break the law with bribery, the Office of Inspection and the Imperial Censorate will also attack at the same time. What will you do then?"

Chang Geng revealed a half smile, "If there is someone who could handle this mess, take back Jiangnan and bring peace to the four fronts, then I will pack my bags and leave. Master Xu, what I did was not for myself, nor for people to praise me - if they want to accuse me, then they are free to do so, I could face my own conscience and the heaven, at midnight whether I sleep at the Grand Council or the imperial prison, the ancestors will not come to slap me, other matters..."

No longer did he continue to speak, the young and handsome face of *Yan Wang* seemed to flash with a bitter laugh of self-ridicule. Xu Ling seemed to see the loneliness and helplessness surrounding him, his heart trembled greatly, his face burned —

The Imperial Censorate had been humiliated by *Yan Wang* in public more than once. For a long time, they had wished nothing more than to grasp his weak point and bite *Yan Wang*'s party to death.

And the Office of Inspection was the gathering place of 'pure party*' in the court — much like Xu Ling, they were unwilling to cling to power and nobility, and disdained to join with the merchants and businessmen filled with the stench of money. They regarded themselves as being loyal only to the ruler and regarded what Yan Wang did as drinking poison to quench thirst. In addition, there were dirty rumors everywhere. They always thought that Yan Wang was a power treacherously playing the Emperor in his hands.

*清流, *qingliu, lit. pure stream, a term associated with the grouping of orthodox scholar-officials who were well known in social circles or in the academic field.*

Xu Ling went south with *Yan Wang* this time, investigating and dealing with corrupt officials was one thing, more importantly, taking advantage of when the noble family and the new officials fighting into a pair of black-eyed chickens, the two offices have planned to join hands to uncover *Yan Wang*'s crime as the one who started it all.

Xu Ling's purpose for this trip was not simple. On one hand, it was due to Emperor Long An who did not feel assured of *Yan Wang* Li Min, on the other, it was for the two offices wanting to seize evidence of *Yan Wang*'s traitorous intent —

There was someone here exhausting himself for the devastation of Jiangbei and Jiangnan, even though his means had been a bit tough, while they were in the court waiting to catch his error. In the end, who on earth was truly the one bringing harm to the country and the people?

Xu Ling couldn't help but get choked up: "Your Highness..."

Chang Geng raised his eyebrows slightly, "Master Xu, What's wrong?"

Xu Ling could not speak for a moment.

Gu Yun silently led the way in front. Xu Ling, a scholar, thinking he was whispering in a low voice, in fact, when Marshal Gu's ears were not deaf, he could hear every word in the wind.

He caught a glimpse of a guard fuming with anger upon hearing it, then glanced at Ge Chen whose expression was pale. He could almost come to understand the origin of this 'accident' causing them to fall into the enemy's territory.

Chapter 88: Camp Commotion

—

A second later, the chaos on the shore was not over yet, a Western dragon had quickly rushed out of the Western Garrison Port at dawn.

—

Gu Yun bowed his head slightly, and when he thought about it, he already understood who was meant to watch this trip down south.

To some extent, Gu Yun, who grew up in the deep palace, knew Li Feng better than Chang Geng.

If a person's ambition was too high but their ability was not enough, it was easy to fall into Li Feng's situation. Emperor Long An certainly the way of power and tactics, but in the end, the most powerful shepherd dog could only lead the sheep. Even if it had sharp teeth and could kill a wolf in a one on one fight, it could not become the king of wolves — that was the general logic applied to humans as well.

Gu Yun did not need to inquire about the main political opinions or how many factions there were in the Court. Whatever the purpose of Xu Ling on this trip was, no matter which faction he belonged to, in the end, he was Li Feng's man.

Li Feng liked this type of mallet, who did not use flattering words, did not form a party, with no status and no background, he only pursued the word 'pure minister' for all his life.

In the eyes of Emperor Long An, the words 'pure minister' has two meanings: first, they must have been promoted by the Emperor himself, with no support from any noble family or powerful minister behind their backs, their background must be clean, and secondly, they must make the Emperor feel reassured and was easy to control.

At the beginning, *Yan Wang* Li Min, had indeed walked this path. At that time, he had no foundation, no place of dependence, no power, and no influence in the court, only a meager bits of royal blood in his entire being, it was also mixed blood that caused doubts in people. He almost resembled an ignorant man fearlessly shouldering the beam of the Grand Council. He was of course, a 'pure minister' in Li Feng's eyes.

However, Li Feng later found that *Yan Wang* was no 'ignorant man'. He possessed too many tactics big and small that could summon the cloud and rain. The Emperor was already fooled by him once and thus no longer dared to believe his 'purity', that was why Emperor Long An had sent someone purer to restrain him.

Through the swallow-like eyes on Master Xu's face, there was an Emperor looking out. It was a pity that inside those *'Qian Li Yan'* was the personality of a newborn, it was presumably that *Yan Wang*'s many tricks had not yet been used, he had already placed himself onto the hook.

Right now, Great Liang did not have a place for a true loyal and pure minister. Gu Yun, who had for many years avoided dipping his hands in internal affairs, still knew full well what type of people they were.

Chang Geng's behavior after entering the court, even though he was far away in the frontier, he had heard a little about what he had done. But knowing and hearing was one thing, seeing was another.

In fact, up to this time, in Gu Yun's heart, Chang Geng was still that gentle and simple young man. Perhaps he was more brilliant than others, but he would never look down on people because of his talents. Perhaps he had a little bit of petty temperament, but he did not get angry easily. Even if it happened, it happened in a proper manner, only to express to the offender that *'I'm angry'*. The person would at most only feel like they were being scratched lightly by a dear little animal, only leaving a little white mark and not breaking the skin.

Could make one love him down to the bones.

So genuine and so warm… genuine to the point of even though he understood it full well in his heart, on the emotional aspect, in the end, he could not connect him with the resolute *Yan Wang* Li Min.

Now, under the bitter wind and rain of Jiangnan, these two images that seemed to be unrelated to each other, finally gradually merged into one. For a time, both images seemed so distant and strange.

Gu Yun's chest pain that caused him to be unable to breathe now turned even worse.

But in the enemy's line, it was not convenient for the Marshal to start mourning for no good reason, thus he had put on an almost frivolous relaxed look on his face, silently enduring this pain.

The group of people soon came to the nearest guard post together with captive. According to the captive, their guard post was patrolled in two batches alternatively. The patrol for the no man's land was very simple. Over time, these Western cavalry relatively neglected their duty, unaware even if the enemy had sneaked inside.

"That foreigner said there were only two Heavy Armors in the sentry," Xu Ling whispered. "There's nothing else for us to take advantage of. Marshal, can Heavy Armor help us cross the river?"

"Yes," Gu Yun replied, "it sinks when it goes down, even faster than a pig cage. It specializes in dealing with all kinds of adulterer wives and husbands."

Xu Ling: "..."

It was a shame for he thought the Marquis of Order had become somewhat proper, it now all seemed to only be an illusion.

Gu Yun wiped his face, erasing all his traces of exhaustion and pretended to be in very high spirits: "No need to rush it, let's first borrow the disguise of these foreigners to mix up in front of the river then wait for an opportunity to find the incredibly fast Dragon of theirs. Master Xu can rest assured, I have notified General Zhong that when we reach the river, they will automatically assist us."

Xu Ling replied with a serious look, "Marshal Gu had already managed to contact General Zhong? When did you do it?"

Gu Yun said, "The hearts are connected, that's all."

...Beginning to talk nonsense again.

Master Xu, who was deceived time and time again, finally learned to shut his mouth in front of Gu Yun, and deduced from this, he could understand where *Yan Wang*'s stable and unfazed personality even when the sky falls came from.

But Chang Geng was severely shocked. He himself did indeed notify General Zhong, but it was through using Lin Yuan Pavilion's method. It was not convenient for Xu Ling to hear of it. He had prepared another set of plays to show to Master Xu, who knew that through a few words, Gu Yun had shouldered this unlawful act for him.

Gu Yun held the black tiger emblem in his hands, able to mobilize troops on all four sides during wartime, it was not uncommon for him to have a secret way of contacting with the border garrisons. After listening to him, even if one was any more foolish, they would come to understand and stop any questioning. If they later meet the reinforcements, Xu Ling would not be any more suspicious.

Chang Geng's wet palm suddenly broke out a layer of cold sweat.

"He already knew," Chang Geng's heart trembled and sank into coldness.

Man proposes, God disposes. Even if a plan was any more perfect, it could not avoid having accidents outside of expectation. For Chang Geng, the first one was on that day when he proposed to travel to the south. Before he could have said it in a straightforward manner, Gu Yun had unexpectedly stepped out to quickly handle it.

The arrow already mounted on the string could not avoid being shot, he must continue on and made his many arrangements in more and more discretion.

When it came to Gu Yun, the resourceful *Yan Wang* who had never blundered would still have momentary confusion — it was not that his brain and intellect fell short, but it was because he himself could not tell what was it that he wanted to do.

On one hand, he wanted to conceal this matter with Xu Ling as well as Gu Yun. After all, conspiracy was nothing to be prideful of, there would always exist lowly tactics behind it all. He did not want Gu Yun to see that he was the type who does not shy away from any scheme and calculation, nor did he dare to think about how Gu Yun would feel about this matter.

On the other hand, he courageously hoped that Gu Yun would be able to see through the truth clearly. It was almost a kind of mentality of acting spoiled that made one unreasonably pick a fight with people closest to them, wanting to let them know that '*I am that type of person*'.

He was in a dilemma — afraid of meeting Gu Yun's limit, yet he could not help from prodding for his reaction.

Perhaps the most difficult thing to measure in the world was not the enemy's intention, but a beloved's sincere intention that could sometimes still cause one to feel uncertain.

Gu Yun looked back at him intentionally or unintentionally. Chang Geng's eyelids twitched uncontrollably, as if wanting to avoid it. Then looking straight into Gu Yun's eyes, his gaze resembled a hook, wanting to fish out a sign from the inside.

But at this time, a blinded Ge Chen came closer and said in Gu Yun's ear, "Marshal, I suspect that the Heavy Armor of the foreigners was crafted with special technique, which is better than ours in conserving *Ziliujin*. How about you all clear out the people first, I'll take the Heavy Armor apart to learn from them."

Ge Chen's appearance had made Gu Yun avert his gaze. In a hurry, Chang Geng could not grasp the meaning of those eyes, but surrounded by outsiders, he could not come over to ask a clear question, thus he was put in an anxious state.

As Gu Yun heard what was said, he appointed a personal guard to follow Ge Chen, replied with resolution, "If you can't learn anything, I'll treat it as you slacking off from work and you are to be dealt with by military laws after we return, go!"

At his command, more than twenty black crows quietly surrounded the small Western sentry, quietly clearing up the Western soldiers who were still deep in their dreams. From the sentry, they collected a set of garrison defense and control maps plus several sets of Light Armor, each person in the group put on the Light Armor. This way, as long as the mask was down, no one would recognize that the people inside were not the original.

Gu Yun pointed to the shivering captive: "Put him in Light Armor as well, place a lead in the golden box, if he dares to cause trouble, he will be fried into dumpling stuffing — by the way, where is Xiao Ge?"

Ge Chen hurriedly trotted along and said, "I'm here, I'm here, Marshal!"

Gu Yun looked back. In just a moment, this man not only removed the Heavy Armor of foreigners, but also removed the whole core power of the Heavy Armor. Much like a slave to money, tying it to his waist and refusing to put it down. With a pair of bright eyes of a mice that fell into the rice jar, he ran up and said, "Marshal Gu, am I going to have to pretend to be a Western soldier, too? I'm going to take this away. Do we have Light Armor with a larger belly?"

Gu Yun looked at him for a moment, then suddenly directed his guards to tie up Ge Ling Shu, he laughed, "What are you wearing a Heavy Armor for? It's about a dozen pounds! I have a more suitable role for you. You don't have to change your clothes, you can pretend to be an enemy spy who sneaked around thieving and was captured, how about it? In case of being questioned, we would have an excuse ready as well — that's right, you carrying along this thing will appear all the more like you were caught with the evidence — tie him up!"

Ge Chen was put to replace the foreign captive in shock. He was tied up by two relentless guards and hung on a long pole, dangling as he was being carried away. Ge Chen was not foolish, vaguely feeling

that he might have offended the general, and Gu Yun was now deliberately rectifying him, he hurriedly turned to Chang Geng for help: "Your Highness..."

"What Highness?" Gu Yun pulled the iron mask down. The voice came out from behind the cold mask and was covered with a layer of frost. "Cover his mouth. The captives are not allowed to scream."

Yan Wang, who was still anxious, dared not speak out at all. With his acquiescence, Ge Ling Shu became a human-shaped grievances and was taken away on a long pole.

The group of people marched with vigor to the Westerners garrison with the ‘captive’. Near dawn, they had crossed the vast inhabited areas in Jiangnan and approached the enemy's base.

At this time, through the eyes of the *Qian Li Yan*, Gu Yun and others could already see the frightening water monster lying on the river. The iron dragons usually came and went like the wind, this was the first time they faced them in person. Xu Ling was dizzy for a moment. The defense line of Westerners was too tight. His hands were covered in a cold sweat, he did not understand how these people could still be this vigorous in the midst of the enemy's rank.

Before even getting close to the station, the muzzle of several short guns had turned over, all pointing at them.

Xu Ling swallowed with difficulty. At this time, his shoulder was pressed down, Xu Ling heard the voice of *Yan Wang* saying in his ear, "When you are afraid, do not think about how we will die if we were to be found out. You must think that we will have to take care of all these things. If we don't kill them today, we will have to kill them up tomorrow. We are here to kill, not to be killed."

Xu Ling heard a hunter's murderous intent in *Yan Wang*'s light voice, his body shivered slightly, this intent seemed to pass on to him in a tremor. Xu Ling took a deep breath, remembered the devastating white bones in the ancestral hall and closed his eyes. As a result, his fear faded away.

Yan Wang said again, "Hold the lead of the captive well. We can't

understand foreign language very well. We can only rely on Master Xu, if he made any odd movement... Does Master Xu dare to kill?"

Deputy Inspector Xu, who had only ever read books growing up, he had never even killed a chicken, shuddered involuntarily with the lead in his hand. As soon as he did, the Western captive also felt his life was hanging by a thread and shuddered along with him. *Yan Wang* pressed the hand on Xu Ling's shoulder down, the force seeped through the steel armor, like a pair of iron forceps, forcibly stabilizing Xu Ling by external force.

Xu Ling gritted his teeth. "I do, Your Highness rest assured, I will not disgrace the mission."

Chang Geng slowly withdrew his hand. He could feel Gu Yun was watching him, hiding behind the iron mask. He dared not look back, quietly wiping the cold sweat off his palm.

He could tell each person what was it that they should do, but no one could come and give him an advice for his own dilemma.

At this moment, a Western guard said something in foreign language through the *tong hou*, generally asking them what they were doing.

Xu Ling cleared his throat and answered, "During the patrol, we caught a traitor from the Central Plains and took him here to see how he should be dealt with."

The stationed guard doubtfully took a look, Gu Yun tapped their captive on the back with the hilt of the Western sword in silence: "Learn how to read the situation."

Xu Ling did not translate yet, but the Western captive had understood Gu Yun's meaning. He shakily lifted up the Light Armor's mask, a handful of familiar blond hair dispelled the guard's doubts. The guard glanced at Ge Chen, who was hanging on a pole, made a grimace then beckoned. Several muzzles slowly moved away from them, the guard then let them inside the station.

"Wait a moment," said the guard. "The Pope is entertaining

important guests. All the other lords are accompanying him, nobody would be there to decide even if you report it in. First go and register your name, lock up this pig for now, we will roast him in the evening."

The others did not respond. Xu Ling knew that even Yan Wang could not give him any guidance at this time. He swallowed his saliva and asked as calmly as possible, "Where are the guests from?"

"Holy Land," the guard scratched his face impatiently. "Don't ask too much of what you shouldn't know about. I really don't know when they would let us go back, this battle is over. Hey, brothers, the good for nothing bunch in the no-man's land has caught a spy, give them a few bites of dried meat to eat. Perhaps they would never make a contribution this grand again for the rest of their lives."

The group of Western soldiers laughed aloud.

Xu Ling felt more reassured and took the lead in pushing the Western captive to the direction that they were guided. Who knew that at this moment, the Western captive suddenly struggled, the lead that Xu Ling was holding was exposed. The Western guards who had not yet left caught sight of it: "Hold on, what is that behind you?"

Xu Ling's cold sweat came down.

The guard approached Xu Ling suspiciously, eyed him up and down, and suddenly reached down, placing his hand on the sword at his waist: "Push your mask up."

Xu Ling's heart was beating wildly, he went stiff, unable to move.

At that moment, a sharp alarm suddenly came from a distance, flames rose against the wind towards the sky. Many Western soldiers ran past them. The Western guard questioning them was momentarily distracted, Chang Geng then took a step forward, not knowing where he had obtained a slender needle as long as an arm, piercing it into the guard's neck in no time.

Without a word, the Western guard was dead standing in the spot. A soldier took off the guard's helmet, cut Ge Chen's ropes and

placed it on his head.

Xu Ling gasped for breath and noticed that Gu Yun's guards were missing one person. In the next moment, Gu Yun grabbed Xu Ling's lead and dropped a sentence: "Go."

Before Xu Ling could react, he saw Gu Yun pull the lead behind the captive. He did not know what Gu Yun's Wind Slasher had touched behind the Light Armor of the Westerner, he kicked him out with one foot. With the help of Gu Yun's kick, the captive was plunged forwards with the force of the Armor's spurting mist.

The captive let out an inhuman scream. At the same time, the movement on their side could not avoid going unnoticed. The guards of the Black Iron Camp were extremely well-trained. As Gu Yun made a gesture, each of them raised their own bow and artillery and shot away in all directions.

Only now did the Light Armor of the captive explode. The shockwave shook the camp and Western soldiers around him away. Xu Ling was not able to stand firm for a moment, but a hand wearing Light Armor had caught him and led him forward.

The group of people ran like mad in the midst of chaos. Gu Yun reached out and stopped Xu Ling together with Chang Geng who was dragging him. He quickly asked in a low voice: "How do you say '*they have ran off that way, after them*'?"

Xu Ling had no time to respond and instinctively translated the words into the language of the Westerners.

As soon as he finished, the enemy troops had caught up to them. Gu Yun raised his hand and pulled out the sword on the Light Armor of the Westerner, vividly mimicked the sentence Xu Ling had just taught him, at the same time, he took the lead and fiercely chased 'after them'.

Donning the same armor suits and masks, they could not be differentiated from one another. Gu Yun had been in charge of the Black Iron Camp for many years, he truly had the temperament of a general. At his command, the Western soldiers could not help from

running with him.

Xu Ling: "..."

They inexplicably went from being the surrounded to being the pursuers.

All the way up to the river, Xu Ling saw a black shadow suddenly coming from a distance. It was one of Gu Yun's guards missing from just now, the Western armor disguise on him had been unloaded. The officers of the Black Iron Camp made a long whistle, then jumped into the river. Xu Ling adapted quickly, he shouted in the foreign language: "Onto the ship, after them!"

Gu Yun had no idea that Xu Ling would take after them so fast, he could not help but give him a thumbs up.

Before Xu Ling could feel proud, he was thrown by Gu Yun with the force of dozens of kilograms of Light Armor from the riverside, falling down onto a Western dragon. The Western navy could also hear the movement on the shore, coming to take a look in confusion.

At that time, several black shadows fell one after another, cleanly taking care of all the navy with a sweep of their blade with no delay. There was no sound — before the bodies could fall, they were already caught by the killers. To outsiders, it appeared as if comrade-in-arms were entering the cabin side by side.

A second later, the chaos on the shore was not over yet, a Western dragon had quickly rushed out of the Western Garrison Port at dawn.

Chapter 89: Beaten

—

You see yourself as a pig and a dog, who will see you as a human person? You don't know how to cherish yourself, who are you crying to, seeking to be loved?

—

To be able to drive the incredibly fast Western dragon out with his own hands, even if he had just been suspended as an air-dried pork for half a day, Ge Chen felt it was all worth it. He was as excited as a lecher when seeing the most beautiful woman in the world, touching the operating platform of the dragon back and forth, the only thing missing was to drool all over.

Gu Yun's guard, who set fire to jump into the river, blasted off a firework with a strange color. Ge Chen drove the dragon straight towards it immediately. At the next moment, an iron chain as thick as a child's arm screeched as it swept by, slashing open the sea breeze.

But the man in the water was the Black Iron Camp elite. Instead of being frightened by this weapon, he climbed up the iron chain and swept half a circle with it, then borrowed the momentum to flip onto the dragon.

Ge Chen shouted out, "Hold on tight! Ling Shu Institute had yearned for the Western dragon for a long time. Today we finally got one. Marshal, after this, even if you tell us to follow after you to be the servants picking up your leftover, it would not matter ha ha ha!"

Everyone was shaken by Ge Ling Shu's driving style resembling a person jumping in joy. Everyone could only try their best to hold on to the railings beside them, there was no room to pay attention to anything else. Gu Yun's ears were full of the roaring sound of river water beating against the body of the dragon. As he grinded his teeth, he thought, *"He was already being tied up just now, why didn't I think of beating him up?"*

The dragon flew past under the sea monster. At this time, it was too late for the Westerners to respond.

The Westerner garrison on the south coast recovered from the chaos and was ready to pursue after them. Unexpectedly, before the order was given, a dark and oppressive stretch of Great Liang's large dragons appeared across the river left the port without warning.

Master Ja put down his *Qian Li Yan* in horror and hastily ordered, "Slow down! Don't chase them! It's a trick. Gather the fleets and be ready to fight! Damn it, how come the people of Central Plains who had huddled up for so long suddenly went out to battle today?"

The Pope's expression was not very good either. He personally accompanied a man with a moustache out of the camp - it was the so-called 'guest from the Holy Land'. They exchanged a look of seeing face to face but not eye to eye. The Pope turned his head and looked anxiously at the army stationed in Jiangbei, where the soldiers were getting into formation as if to put pressure on the border.

In a twinkling of an eye, the Dragon on the river disappeared into the Great Liang large dragon fleet. While the two sides were already in formation, ready to face the enemy, the Great Liang naval force suddenly changed its front team to the back in front of the puzzling eyes of the enemy, slowly retreating back without making any move, as if they had only come out for a display.

Not mentioning the Western army watching in confusion on the other side of the river, when General Zhong received Chang Geng's letter delivered by the wooden bird, he was in shock, secretly scolding this madman for behaving this excessive.

However, both *Yan Wang* and the Marquis of Order came in person. Two civil and military officers in charge of Jiangbei affairs must come out personally to welcome them.

Zhong Chan greeted with the proper courtesy: "Greeting to Your Royal Highness Yan Wang and Marshal Gu..."

Both of them had been his apprentice in the past. Neither would

let the old general bow to them, both stepped forward to lift him up, one left, one right.

Gu Yun's eyes inadvertently passed over the back of General Zhong's hand which was covered with tiny brown spots. It seemed as if only one layer of skin was left, and a scent of aging poured on his face.

Zhong Chan had passed the age rarely seen before, although his back was still straight, his hair was already white. He was unable to bear the weight of a Light Armor of tens of kilograms, wearing only a thin armor for symbolism.

Gu Yun looked at him, feeling a mixture of many emotions for a moment.

He used to admire General Zhong very much, wishing he could follow his example - discarded his official position and title together, kept his name anonymously and wandered the world. No one would be able to find him. How happy it would be.

However, as his wishes came in a full circle, before he could go, General Zhong had returned with his old body. Both of them - one from the south, one from north - dedicated to doing their part. Gu Yun felt as if he had seen a circle of fate that could not be avoided.

Zhong Chan glanced at Chang Geng with an unfathomable look, then watched Gu Yun and said, "Marshal Gu's complexion does not seem to be very good."

Gu Yun laughed and said, "I received the imperial order to ensure that the two imperial envoys, *Yan Wang* and Master Xu, were safely sent back to the capital. As a result, we fell into the enemy's ranks right after we set off. I was frightened to death. How could my complexion look good?"

Zhong Chan said lightly, "In this case, let's discuss the matter of a feast for later. Chong Ze, you first arrange for the Masters to change clothes and bath, rest for a while before discussing anything else. In this crucial times, there are still some military affairs to take care of, I can not accompany you all."

After that, he took a look at *Yan Wang* with not much enthusiasm or friendliness, put his hands together in an indifferent way, and turned away. Chang Geng knew that the old general was not very satisfied with his arrangement, thus he stood aside obediently and did not say a word.

Zhong Chan was already at this age, golden sand had already come up to his neck, there was no telling when he would go to see the former emperor, thus there was no need for him to flatter anyone.

Moreover, to him, the high-ranking gentlemen in the court could all be considered to be the younger generation, whether the people who came was *Yan Wang* or the Marquis of Order, the old man did not care to respect. Xu Ling, who had just escaped from death, was stunned by his attitude.

Only Yao Zheng on the side holding his aching head, trying to find a few words to ease the atmosphere, then busily arranged resting places for all of them.

Gu Yun cleaned up and changed his clothes that had been drenched by the rain. However, he was already exhausted before he could do anything else, instructing that he was not to be disturbed, he then took a long nap in his tent.

When he woke up, it was already dark, the scene in front of Gu Yun's eyes were blurry, the sound around him was unclear. As soon as he moved, there was already a hand stretched out beside him, thoughtfully helping him drink two cups of tea to wake up, then a bowl of medicine with familiar scent was handed to him.

Gu Yun already knew who it was without the need to ask.

Gu Yun appeared dreary, he felt even more exhausted after sleeping. He was in no mood to pay attention to Chang Geng. He downed the bowl of medicine and fell back on his pillow, closed his eyes and waited for the effect to arrive.

Chang Geng sat quietly on one side, using his fingers in place of the silver needles, lingering lightly on the acupoints between his head and neck. Gu Yun was made drowsy due to his fingers, feeling that

his meager bits of consciousness was much like a shaky lamp light in the wind, burning intermittently.

A moment later, the gradually clearing sound and the continuous aching sensation rose at the same time, Gu Yun was completely awake now and could not help but frown slightly.

Chang Geng's hands stopped, he bowed his head and kissed Gu Yun's frown gently. He distanced himself instantly as if to test the water. Perhaps seeing how Gu Yun did not react, his courage grew stronger and he littered light small kisses down Gu Yun's nose, and finally fell on the lips with the still lingering bitter taste.

Gu Yun had just finished drinking the medicine and had yet to rinse his mouth. His throat was filled with bitterness, not wanting to kiss him, he slightly tilted his head to avoid it.

Who knew this careless movement of avoidance somehow stimulated Chang Geng, his still quiet breathing suddenly changed, becoming erratic, channeling all his force into his arms and tightened them around Gu Yun, bringing with him an unspeakable despair, surging onto the man. It seemed almost as if he did not intend to kiss, but tear and bit from utmost hatred.

Gu Yun reached out to pinch back his neck, but Chang Geng grabbed his hand halfway and forced it back onto the bed.

Give him an inch and he would take a mile.

Gu Yun frowned and took Chang Geng's elbow to the edge of the bed, knocking on his numbing vein. At the pain, he instinctively released his hand. However, he would come forward once again regardless.

Gu Yun stopped him: "Where do you think this is, are you mad?"

Chang Geng's breathing was too heavy, not willing to let go of him even in death. Even when he got caught, he still would stubbornly break his own arm to reach this person. His wrist was twisted to a certain extent, making a cracking noise, the stubbornness of his that would rather hurt himself than retreat was greatly

frightening.

Gu Yun could not break his wrist, of course. However, when he loosened his hand a little, Chang Geng rushed up, seemingly trapping the man in the square inch of the bed. He stared at Gu Yun with the eyes of a starving wolf.

Greedy yet fearful.

It was as if he was desperate, yet nervous about something at the same time.

Gu Yun's blurred vision gradually found their focus. He could see all four sides clearly and realized that he had unconsciously slept for a whole day. He went to rest at dawn, at this time, it was just past dusk, the sky gradually converged.

He looked into Chang Geng's eyes in the dim light, but did not find the ominous blood and double pupils in his eyes. He knew that he was conscious at this time and was purely picking a fight.

Not long after the confrontation, the ferocious intent in Chang Geng's eyes finally faded away like the tide, while an unspeakable pleading expression slowly tore through the water surface and emerged: "Zi Xi, I..."

Gu Yun asked coldly, "You what?"

Chang Geng shrank involuntarily in front of his gaze and slowly let go of him. His whole body was as stiff as a puppet, he closed his eyes slightly and sat dejected on one side.

He was too sensitive when it came to Gu Yun, to the point that he did not even have to say anything. One look from him could break his heart and soul into pieces.

Silence spread in the small camp tent. For a long time, Chang Geng whispered in the dead stillness that even the drop of a needle could be heard: "This time going south, I want to force Li Feng to stand on my side and try to find out how big a storm those noble families can set off. Those people are old-fashioned, their internal relations were not as tight as iron either. Movements too big in the

capital will easily be rebounded, it would be better to use Jiangnan as a breakthrough, baiting them into scattering by themselves and fall into the trap."

"I also want to take the opportunity to push the new officers to the stage, waiting for the next step to completely eliminate those who opposed and clean up the court."

There seemed to be a dark tide sweeping through his few sentences. He absolutely did not mention the word 'settle the refugees'. As if he was throwing a tantrum, refusing to say anything good about himself. How insidious and cunning, how ugly and shameless, the more he wanted to speak of it.

There was no one who did not know that Yan Wang can adapt to whoever he spoke with. As long as he wished to, even an old thorn like Zhang Feng Han could be coaxed into submission. But at this time, facing Gu Yun, he felt that he had become a young version of Zhang Feng Han, specialized in speaking of things that Gu Yun did not like to hear.

But as he opened his mouth, it was already irremediable. He gasped for a moment, and continued to say, "These new officers were brought up by myself using the *Feng Huo* tickets, gathered to form a party in the midst of national disasters, they did not need to be painstakingly nurtured in the future, as long as they were carefully looked after, they would surely be able to lead to a new trend, quickly turn the old dynasty and system upside down. I want Emperor Wu's arbitrary rule to disappear starting from this generation. As for Li Feng, it doesn't matter what he wants, I will be happy as long as all the Li people are dead."

At this time, Gu Yun was able to understand it - this bastard felt ashamed towards himself, but instead deliberately showed his might, insisted on picking a fight to feel reassured.

Gu Yun thought with flame arising in his heart, *"As you wish then."*

Thus he asked in the tone of quarreling, "Then are you not a Li? Is your last name Gou*? Or Zhu**?"

**dog*
***pig*

"Me?" Chang Geng gave a short laugh. "I'm born not even as good as a pig or a dog, only but a puppet of human flesh in the hands of the barbarian woman..."

Before he could finish, Gu Yun raised his hand and gave him a slap. Chang Geng instinctively closed his eyes, but he refused to dodge. The palm brought with it a strong surge of wind, but it stopped at his neck before falling on his face.

"Merits or mistakes, there are people in the world to be the judge, for what reason must you cling to me wishing to get scolded?" Gu Yun wanted to soften his tone, who knew that as he spoke of the latter part, he truly did become angry. "Crying, screaming and hanging yourself, forcing me to accept that you can do whatever you wish to, that everything you do is correct, even if it was any more immoral, I must agree with both hands. Would that please you then? You will be able to sleep soundly? Your conscience will be at peace?"

His voice seemed to carry with it a blade, each and every sentence stabbing a hole into him, Chang Geng shuddered as if he was in great pain, he said with a tremble, "What does the world have to do with me? Everyone in the world had forsaken me. I never owed anything to them, I do not care who judges me."

"But living people must have wishes, Zi Xi, for my entire life, these meager wishes that cannot be divided are all placed in you. Now you want to cut them off, it is equal to giving me one path to death, I will go now."

"Oh, why, Your Highness *Yan Wang* is going to die for me to see?" Gu Yun almost laughed at him from anger, "In this life I despise being threatened the most!"

Chang Geng felt as if he had fallen into an ice cellar. He couldn't restrain himself from trembling. He had not talked to Gu Yun for the entire day, he was extremely anxious and uneasy. Wanting to do the same as when tricking Xu Ling, knowing the proper limit and calculation, coming to explain to him, it was not a difficult deed

either.

But thousands of logic, he knows clearly of them inside, yet he could not do it, could not help it.

Even knowing that the matter of the heart could cloud judgment, resembling a double-edged sword without a handle, hurting oneself and the other with just the slightest of movement.

Gu Yun pushed him aside. Chang Geng was shocked, hurriedly stretched out his hand to grab him. "Zi Xi, don't go!"

Gu Yun took his wrist and forced him to open his palm. Not knowing where he had pulled out a piece of something, he lifted his hand and slashed it down onto Chang Geng's palm. With a loud clap, Chang Geng trembled violently. His Highness *Yan Wang*, who had never been hit by a teacher before, was shocked and forgot about his struggle for a while.

What Gu Yun hit him with was the white jade flute: "You see yourself as a pig and a dog, who will see you as a human person? You don't know how to cherish yourself, who are you crying to, seeking to be loved? Are you low or not? Are you low or not? *Are you low or not?*"

With each of his scolds, he delivered a slash, three slashes in a row onto Chang Geng's palm, all hits were in the same place, the red print did not spread.

After finishing, Gu Yun used the white jade flute to tilt his chin up: "How other people treat you, what relation does it have with you? Others fear you, respect you, you would become invincible, others abandon you like an old shoe, you would truly become a goddamn mass of mud? Just a barbarian woman who already died eight generations ago, with a meager bit of heretical magic disturbing the mind. Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

Chang Geng: "..."

"Your Royal Highness *Yan Wang* was praised for knowing more than what could be contained in five carts of books*, but do you not

know what is called 'self-respect'? What is in your five carts? Toilet paper?" Gu Yun threw the jade flute aside as he spoke and sighed, "You waited all day just to be beaten. Now you've got what you want. Get out of here."

学富五车, an idiom that means wealthy in knowledge*

Chang Geng sat on the bed, grasped his red and swollen palm, slightly relished in the white hot pain, and looked up at Gu Yun incredibly.

Gu Yun poured himself a cup of herbal tea with his back towards Chang Geng and drank it slowly, as his anger waned out, he asked, "When will the Liangjiang refugees be able to settle down?"

Chang Geng said in a hoarse voice: "... If it's fast - before the end of the year."

Gu Yun asked the same question as Xu Ling: "When can we go to battle at the Nothern Frontier and Jiangnan?"

Chang Geng closed his eyes and answered softly, "The internal affairs of the Western countries are not united. From this point of view, we can see that even the Pope's position is on the verge of collapse, he will send envoys to negotiate with us within the year. If the plan is taken into account, one or two years of rest and recuperation will enable us to go into battle."

Gu Yun was silent for a moment. "After the war, how long will the peace last?"

Chang Geng: "When the country is strong and powerful, four sides will fall into place."

"Mm," Gu Yun nodded and said, "You can go ahead."

Chang Geng weren't able to react for a moment: "Go... Go where?"

Gu Yun: "Aren't you going to investigate Yang Rong Gui with Xu Ling about withholding information? Why, did I guess it wrong? Not going right in the night, are you still waiting for Old Zhong to treat

you to a meal first?"

Chang Geng looked at him in a daze.

"I have to stay in Jiangbei for a few more days," Gu Yun said. "You can bring those twenty guards with you. Unless the foreigners and navy cross the river, they will be enough to deal with the underlings of the local officials. It's going to be dark. Don't delay any longer."

Chang Geng stood up silently and tidied up his messy appearance.

"What's more," Gu Yun said, "Your hand, find some medicine to treat it later."

Chang Geng struggled to turn away. He seemed to be enduring it for a while, then whispered, "Yifu, I want you."

Gu Yun thought for a moment that something was wrong with his ear. "What did you say?"

Chang Geng no longer repeated, his ears blushed red, glancing at Gu Yun with both eagerness and avoidance, his eyes kept drilling into the snow white hem of his clothes.

Gu Yun: "..."

Gu Yun, no matter how frivolous, he was only the average type of frivolous. In 'that' matter, he also retained the bad habits of the sons of noble family, paying attention to the mood, 'when the timing and place were ideal, before the flowers and under the moon*, everything will fall into place'. He really could not explain the type of 'energetic' that must call 'yifu' in bed, getting turned on after being beaten like this. His scalp was tingling for a moment, thinking to himself: *"Seems to be quite crazy."*

**an ideal place for lovers*

So he pointed to the door of the military tent and simply said, "Get out."

Chang Geng did not dare to delay his official business, all his overflowing desires had to be suppressed. He gave Gu Yun a secret glance with embarrassment, reluctantly calmed his feelings down and ran away.

End of Volume 3

Volume IV: Man Returning Untired [归人不倦] | Chapter 90: True and False

Hi, we're back! Just a little note, we made a mistake with General Zhong's name... it's Chan and not Xian, sorry for overlooking this OTL corrected name will now be reflected on past and upcoming chapters.

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Even if one day he truly lost control, I can handle it. Tens of thousands of the Black Iron Camp soldiers are still guarding the national gate in the northwest, they will not let him run amok.

—

There was a heavy rain pouring down, but Liangjiang was unlike the north, instead of the clear sky washed by the rain, it became more and more humid.

Jiangbei Garrison was at first a true miscellaneous army. After more than a year under General Zhong's hands, it had started to take shape. If the enemy camp Gu Yun broke into also possessed the same quality, it would probably not be turned over by them so easily.

Gu Yun and Zhong Chan walked their horses side by side. Neither one of them wore armor, and neither thought the other was walking too slow.

"For these few years, there was never a day where I could be idle," Gu Yun said. "The last time I was able to converse with Teacher, I no longer remember which month and year it was."

When there were no outsiders, the Marquis of Order called him Teacher, Zhong Chan was not being overly courteous either, accepting it with his expression unchanging, he replied, "The little Marquis had matured more and more. If the old Marquis is still alive, seeing what you have achieved today, he would perhaps..."

Gu Yun continued his words, "Beat me to death."

Zhong Chan was stunned, the facial features that appeared to have been carved by a knife showed a little stingy smile: "There is no need to look down on yourself as such."

The breeze of the river came from the south, with the vapor in the air, it made one feel damp all around. Gu Yun brushed his untied hair and looked silently towards the south bank, thinking of the barren villages and the white bones he had witnessed himself, the smile on his face gradually turn grave.

Zhong Chan followed his gaze and clapped Gu Yun on the shoulder with his hand. "The matter of fate is difficult to say. Not mentioning us mortals, it was impossible for even gods to go against the flow of life. Allow me to say a few disrespectful words as an elder. Looking at the current situation, not mentioning the old Marquis, but even if your grandfather - Emperor Wu was alive, it would not necessarily be able to be of help either. We do our best, obey our destiny, and have a clear conscience - that is enough."

Gu Yun was stunned. This teacher of his was really familiar with military books, excellent in both civil and military matters. When he was teaching him, he was also truly 'inhumane'. Unexpectedly, during these years traveling the pugilist world, he had become more broad-minded.

Zhong Chan: "We are not afraid to fight on land. The main problem is that our Navy is still short of breath. Look at the Westerners, they either walk on sea or approached on the river. They also know this. I have given thoughts on how to fight battles on water these days, but it had not yet been perfected. You are not leaving for now, let us discuss more carefully about it in your free time."

Gu Yun nodded: "I know that our Dragons are not good either. This time, we were able to get a Western dragon for ourselves, let Ge Chen bring it back to the capital to see what Ling Shu Institute has in mind."

Zhong Chan sighed, "Soldiers can be trained, but equipment and

Ziliujin, this old man truly is helpless, I can only rely on you young people to work as hard as possible."

Gu Yun's eyebrows moved, vaguely knowing who General Zhong was about to speak of.

Sure enough, the next moment, Zhong Chan said, "When *Yan Wang* was a teenager, he had spent several years by my side."

Gu Yun: "Yes, I know. I have troubled Teacher."

Zhong Chan: "Then, do you know that the Lin Yuan emblem is in his hands?"

Gu Yun paused for moment, wanting to say *'I didn't know*', but feeling a little guilty, he had to tell the truth: "He did not mention it to me, but I do have some guesses... If it weren't for Lin Yuan Pavilion, Du God of Wealth and the others would not have supported him as such."

Zhong Chan replied with an 'Ah', then continued, "*Yan Wang* does not possess the arrogance of youth in his teenage years, he was calm and had self-restraint, he could be a bit stubborn, but is not the type who only know self-pitying. He understood right from wrong, that benevolence and righteousness came first - he was much better than you when you were a child."

Gu Yun: "..."

Zhong Chan glanced at him, squinted his eyes, and showed a little smile that was difficult to catch, fading away as soon as it appeared: "But the way I see it, young people that are not a little frivolous, sometimes it is not a good thing. He matured too soon contrary to human nature, it must be due to too much suffering in his childhood - the matter of the Barbarian witches, I also heard about it from the Chen family's girl. What are you planning to do?"

Gu Yun did not reply quickly but pondered for a moment.

Zhong Chan said, "The Bone of Impurity entangling Chang Geng is not his will. Sometimes I think that I am too cautious, doubting him as such, it is not fair to him. If he is just an ordinary person from

an ordinary family, no matter what happened, I should not say anything at all. But he is not, what his body was connected with is the country - Zi Xi, right now the court had one *Yan Wang*, pulling one hair will affect the whole body. One cannot leave his side, but cannot rely entirely on him either, do you understand?"

Gu Yun probably understood General Zhong's insinuation that he should not let *Yan Wang* have too much power. When necessary, he should try to suppress him with the force of the military, and retreat when needed.

But Gu Yun did not continue this sentence. He only said, "I will take care of him. You can rest assured, Teacher."

Zhong Chan frowned. "I know the boy grew up with you when he was young, there is a deep sense of affection, but how long can you look after him? The heir of Chen family in this generation is that girl, she is only at this age, in ten or eight years, you cannot expect to count on her. Would *Yan Wang*'s mind be able to endure that long?"

"As long as I am alive for a day, I will keep him sober for a day." Gu Yun said. "Even if one day he truly lost control, I can handle it. Tens of thousands of the Black Iron Camp soldiers are still guarding the national gate in the northwest, they will not let him run amok."

Zhong Chan was stunned. For a moment, he felt that he had heard the different meanings in Gu Yun's sentences.

While the two were worrying for nothing behind their backs, Chang Geng and Xu Ling had come to Jiangbei District, Yangzhou City, with twenty guards assigned by Gu Yun. It was difficult for them to dress up as refugees, thus they pretended to be businessmen. They only said that they were in charge of a pawnbroker's branch in Lin An Prefecture under Du Wan Quan, forced to move to Jiangbei due to the war with no job to do.

This time, the trading group had requested the Emperor to build factories along the canal to settle the refugees. Although the court had not yet approved it, it seemed that there was a high chance that it would come through, thus they had sent him north to make a

preliminary investigation.

The name of the Lin An pawnshop, the age and identity of the shopkeeper coincidentally matched with Chang Geng. Du Wan Quan's side had already made the proper arrangements, even if people had the heart to check, they would not be able to find any flaws. The story was seamlessly woven, walking pridefully to Yangzhou.

Either way, Du Wan Qian was now the God of Wealth of the whole country, being brought up deliberately by Chang Geng. A paper from the trading group could go directly to the Grand Council, carrying with them the aura of the imperial merchants. They were of course, much more powerful compared to the local junior officials.

Logically, Du Wan Quan's people and the local government officials must at least meet once, even if in reality, Yang Rong Gui of the Lu family did not get along with Du Wan Quan. He still needed to show respect on the outside, thus he had invited Chang Geng to dinner at Fei Ying Pavilion.

Since the invasion of foreigners, the whole country was in turmoil, the festivities and banquets have been greatly reduced. Up to now, the fallen Qi Yuan Tower had not yet been able to be rebuilt. Xu Ling felt that he had not seen such a place that immersed in wealth like this for a long time. 'Fei Ying Pavilion' was well-known in the local area, it was also being referred to as 'Little Qi Yuan Tower', although it did not possess the same vastness of the star-plucking platform and Yunmeng Grand View, its exquisite luxury was better by a level.

For a long time, the capital city forbade pleasure. This place was far away from the Emperor, no one would pay attention to this rule. The singing voice in Fei Ying Pavilion could be heard from across the street. Coming in and out of the building were all gaudily dressed young men and women.

Xu Ling's tongue was in a knot as he watched this, saying to Chang Geng in bewilderment, "Your High-... Shopkeep, does your manor have this kind of grand scene?"

Chang Geng shook his head and laughed, "Not at all, that person

in my household had already used the little bit of money to help aid orphans and widows. He does not know what is saving up. I think he would even sell his own ancestral house some day."

Xu Ling was stunned for a moment before he could come to the realization that what he spoke of was not the vacant *Yan Wang* Palace, but the Marquis's manor - 'help aid orphans and widows', must have been about helping the dead and the injured.

In the past few years before the war, the national treasury was in a difficult situation, the Emperor intentionally reduced military expenditure, the meager bits of supportive funds were becoming less and less, then having to be delayed afterwards at the hands of the Ministry of Revenue and Ministry of War many times.

Those people would stall, would push back and forth at any chance they could, and just like that, there were times where they would be unable to receive the money. The Marquis of Order coming to their door asking for it was one thing, but within a few years, there was a low chance Gu Yun would be able to return to the capital. Things were always out of his reach, it was safe to assume that he would have to use his own personal funds to make up for it.

It was already this neglected in peacetime, now with the war that broke out, the golden words '*All the goods and materials of the whole country should prioritize garrisons in all parts of the country first*' from the Emperor had once again excluded them...In a few years, if the lost land could be recovered, the survivors of the whole city would still have to rely on mending clothes to maintain their household.

The more he thought, the more Xu Ling's heart became uncertain about how it all felt like.

Chang Geng whispered to him, "I'm afraid we two poor people will have to show our inexperience later on. It doesn't matter. They want us to show our inexperience, it is our goal to be an embarrassment for their entertainment, I have prepared a humorous play waiting for them to see."

Xu Ling then decided to obey his every word, following every of

Yan Wang' s directions, he did not have any objections and followed Chang Geng inside with the ambition to clean up society.

The dinner was invited in the name of Yang Rong Gui.

Yang Rong Gui, the brother-in-law of Officer Lu, named Governor of the Liangjiang, sounded very awe inspiring, but in fact, in this special period, his power was not great.

First of all, the entirety of Jiangnan was not under his control. The Jiangbei garrison was independent, and most of Huainan was not in his hands either. The area under his jurisdiction only consisted of a few local places near the Yangzhou Prefecture.

He was promoted by the court in a rush, in order to have a high ranking federal official to settle the refugees, stabilizing the front and back line. If they were able to recover the lost land in the future, depending on Yang Rong Gui's contribution, he would surely be able to keep his position as one of the eight governors for times to come.

Unfortunately, like a snake swallowing an elephant, the bottomless heart of humans would never know satisfaction. Yang Rong Gui had been dissatisfied with the present situation of Jiangbei ever since he took office, often getting drunk and complaining repeatedly to his trusted confidants that he was only a governor in name, but in reality, he was simply a local officer.

However, Governor Yang's arrogance was not diminished even with his hands full at the moment. In addition, with the Lu family standing behind him, he was naturally born not getting along with the new officials in the court supported by Du Wan Quan. He would of course, not personally come to meet with several businessmen, only sending a few meager idling officers from Yangzhou to accompany them.

During the dinner, the governor of Yangzhou presented himself respectfully. It had not been long since he sat down and said a few empty words, but before he could finish, a servant came in and said something in his ear. Zheng Kun, the governor of Yangzhou, suddenly changed his expression, standing up and left immediately.

Xu Ling was using the alias Zhang Da Fu. He was born pale; after he drank, the sign would show on his face, making him appear especially simple and honest. He pretended to be a bit drunk and asked, intentionally or unconsciously, "Hey, it had only been three rounds of wine, how come Master Zheng already left?"

Someone beside him laughed and said, "Brother Zhang didn't know. Governor Yang was supposed to come in person, but your timing was off, I heard that that man..."

He stretched out his hand in a rather playful manner, gesturing the movement of a bird flapping its wings and whispered, "...arrived at Yangzhou just today. Governor Yang already took a group of lords to go welcome him personally."

Xu Ling thought he had misunderstood, he asked in shock, "Who?"

"Why, don't Brother Zhang know?" The person accompanying the guests had drank too much, his tongue also tied in a knot, chattered endlessly, "*Yan Wang*, that is...the blood brother of the Emperor! I really don't want to mention something this trivial. A few days ago, a troublemaker complaint somehow managed to make its way to the capital, but the Emperor truly took it seriously. He actually sent Yan Wang down. This man is a major character, if we did not serve him well, we would have to be beheaded in public."

After saying this, the person shakes his head and add a sentence: "We are innocent, a straight body is not afraid of an oblique shadow, let him check all he wants, haha... It's just that Master Yang had to go accompany them all the way. It truly was hard work."

Xu Ling's eyes had turned towards Chang Geng at the table before he finished listening.

The real *Yan Wang* was here. Then who was Yang Rong Gui welcoming?

Yan Wang gave him a gentle laugh. He picked up a crystal clear dumpling and threw it into his mouth, not eating would be a waste.

First they broke into the enemy's line, then it was switching people. Although Xu Ling was a scholar, he still knew how to be flexible. Otherwise, he would be frightened to death by *Yan Wang*.

After an unpleasant meal, Xu Ling sent away several dancers clinging to himself and Yan Wang, then hurried back to the inn, confirming that there were no people on either side, he then closed the door and asked in a low voice, "Your Highness, why is there another one..."

Chang Geng laughed and said, "Governor Yang has so many eyes and ears, he must have known when the Imperial Officer left the capital. If we do not let him meet the envoys at least once, would it not cause him to feel suspicious?"

Xu Ling thought for a moment, still not feeling reassured, he said, "Yang Rong Gui has seen Your Highness before, what if he were to find out..."

"Only once or twice, we haven't spoken in less than a hundred steps, he is not so familiar with me. This friend of mine knows a few tricks from the pugilist world. I do not know how well he does in dressing up as others, but dressed up as me, it is dependable and reassured. Let's rest in a minute. We have plans for the evening."

When Xu Ling heard this, his guess was that they would investigate the refugee house tonight, his spirit immediately brightened up.

In the middle of the night, the two men quietly left the city with two Black Iron Camp guards and went straight to the suburbs where the refugees were living. The so-called refugee house was actually only a few shacks outside the city to accommodate the refugees. The summer was hot, it would not be cold even if they were to stay in the open air. A group of officers and soldiers guarding the city nearby watched to keep them from making trouble, there were several big pots near the side of the street. It must be where the people usually received their porridge and ration.

In the middle of the night, the refugees house was quiet, the guards of the Black Iron Camp took the lead in sneaking in. Their footsteps were so light that even the stray cat sleeping beneath the tree was not disturbed.

Xu Ling whispered, "Your Highness, something isn't right. There are usually signs in places where the epidemic occurs, and medicinal water will be sprinkled on the ground. It shouldn't be so quiet."

Chang Geng remained unchanged: "Since Yang Rong Gui knows we are here, he will not be unprepared. Wait and see."

When he finished, the Black Iron Camp guard who had just entered slipped out like a black shadow: "Your Highness, there are only thirty people living in this refugee house, mostly young and middle-aged men and women. There is no sign of the outbreak of the epidemic."

"There are a hundred thousand refugees in Jiangbei, but only thirty people were in the refugee houses outside Yangzhou City?" Xu Ling sneered. "Yang Rong Gui truly underestimated people too much. Are the people living inside also good at talking, well fed, dressed warm and carefree? I think most of them are fake refugees that were hired to be here."

The guard asked, "What can we do, Your Highness?"

"Being completely unfamiliar with one's surroundings is not the way," Chang Geng whispered. "First try to contact Master Liao Ran and let the brothers make a few turns in the vicinity these two days to see if there are any traces. There is no impervious wall in the world. I don't believe Yang Rong Gui can cover the sky with one hand."

That evening, a fast horse left Yangzhou City and went north towards the capital with a secret letter, informing those ambitious people that *Yan Wang* had fallen into the trap.

At the same time, the local city defense officers and soldiers in Jiangbei received dispatches order from the governor of Liangjiang overnight. They came in casual clothes and secretly increased their

troops to the Yangzhou Prefecture. The whole Yangzhou Prefecture was still singing and dancing, but it already became loose on the inside, tightened on the outside.

The poisonous snakes in the capital were waiting to deliver a killing blow in one move. They were patiently lurking in silence. Except for Old Master Shen suddenly falling to grave illness, it seemed that nothing had happened.

Master Shen was bedridden for several days, many doctors were flowing in and out. Even the doctor of the Chen family came personally. Servants of the Shen manor had gone to the coffin shop several times, as if to prepare for the aftermath. Even if Third Madam was any more shameless, she would not be able to mention the marriage at this moment, the matter of connecting two families had been put aside.

Shen Yi took a leave of absence to take care of his old father, closed the door and did not receive any visitors.

At dusk this day, Miss Chen, who came to Shen manor every day, left by the carriage as usual, without attracting the attention of the people who were watching her secretly. At the quiet courtyard where she had temporarily settled in the capital, the door of the carriage opened, but coming from inside was a string of sound from an instrument and a man - it was Shen Yi himself, who should be giving his best in front of the sick bed.

Shen Yi politely put his hands together towards the person inside, "Thank you, Miss Chen."

Chen Qing Xu placed her instrument on her knee and said, "General, remember to be careful. If there are anything, just give me the orders."

Shen Yi looked at her a little more. He did not know about the matter of Lin Yuan Pavilion, only thinking that this woman did not have any titles, position, or power. However, an ordinary girl from the pugilist world would willingly travel with their army, eating sand

and sleeping in the wind, providing assistance in whatever they required. He was immensely grateful inside, speaking with a serious expression, "Miss Chen is noble, I truly admire you very much, words are not enough to express my gratitude."

Chen Qing Xu seemed to have smiled a little - her smile was not obvious, neither was her anger, hardship and favor in this world, as if there was nothing that would be able to shake her, a string of musical sounds then rung from her fingertips.

Shen Yi did not dare to delay any longer, turning over and left for the northern suburbs.

Chapter 91: Royal Robe

T/N: this chapter is Huge

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It was actually a false Dragon Robe good enough to replace the real thing!

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Yang Rong Gui was taller than most, a talented person, and a renowned young master in his younger years. Now he was a little older, growing a moustache, appearing even more mature and steady. He was excellent in treating others, his way of speaking was not shallow either, it was far different from the despicable appearance in Xu Ling's imagination.

But at this time, he had not even had the chance to meet with Yang Rong Gui - the people he met was a pair of false envoys.

Yang Rong Gui's heart was deep and unpredictable, his thoughts were seldom exposed. But the Governor of Yangzhou - Zheng Kun, who had always been serving him, was able to see through it. After sending off *Yan Wang* and his party, Yang Rong Gui stroked his moustache quietly. Although there was no joy on his face, Zheng Kun knew that he was in a good mood. He came forward and said a few flattering words, "It seems that Master Yang and *Yan Wang* get along very well?"

The hidden meaning was: it seemed that *Yan Wang* also knew the depth of the world of officials. He had no intention to pursue this to the end, only wanting to use this matter to gather power for himself.

Yang Rong Gui laughed and said, "His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* is a talented young man. If he were to be refined a little more, he will have great potential for the future. Deputy inspector Xu is a righteous man, a true pure official rarely seen. But I was thinking the Marquis of Order was accompanying them. I didn't realize that the Marquis

was so eager about military affairs, crossed the gate of Yangzhou Prefecture but did not enter, going directly to Jiangbei Camp, not being able to meet with Great Liang's God of War for at least once. It was quite regretful."

Zheng Kun had followed him for a long time. If discussing the matter of being smart flatterer, he was incomparable, immediately assumed he had understood Governor Yang's meaning: *Yan Wang* was young and inexperienced, although his ambition was not at all small, he had already shown his true intent in a few words — he was easy to deal with. That surname Xu was a wooden stick, reading books to the point of being delirious, there was no need to be concerned about him. And the best thing of all, he did not know whether it was 'a martial officer not interfering with internal affairs to avoid suspicion', or it was a deliberate move by *Yan Wang*, shooing the troublesome Marquis of Order far away, letting them carry things out with all their power.

Yang Rong Gui and Zheng Kun looked at each other and smiled. Yang Rong Gui said, "This time, a peasant's nonsense gossip has been spread to the capital, it is reasonable *Yan Wang* must investigate a bit. Go tell the servants to prepare well, we walk straight and stand upright, we do not fear any investigation."

Zheng Kun smiled with understanding and said, "Yes, Master rest assured."

Sending away the joyful Zheng Kun, only now did Yang Rong Gui retract the very faint hint of joy on his face. All that was left was calculating coldness.

He knew that *Yan Wang* would not be easy to send away, but he did not expect it to be this difficult. If it was not for Officer Lu's warning in advance, he would perhaps truly be tricked by him. That *Yan Wang* who had overturned clouds and rains in the court, what kind of incredible tactics did he possess? How could he be an ignorant young man?

The grand plan they calculated had been tight-knit in secrecy all these time, even Zheng Kun had no knowledge of it. If the storm was raging and swords were drawn as soon as *Yan Wang* arrived, they

could react according to the situation, it would have been easy. But he was being this careful…the grand scheme of things would not be good.

That matter must be done as soon as possible.

When Yang Rong Gui and his colleagues took the ‘Inspector and Deputy imperial envoy’ to visit their ‘refugee house’ with very few residents in the suburbs, Chang Geng and Xu Ling were exploring the situation of the refugees everywhere in disguise. What puzzled Xu Ling the most was that his Royal Highness *Yan Wang* with his noble status would mingle in the city like a fish in water, chatting with small merchants and people from all walks of life in the pugilist world. With the false *Yan Wang* at the front covering those people's eyes and ears, no one would pay attention to them. It had not been a few days, but Xu Ling had made several friends close enough to come to their houses for free meals.

Finally, the things they wanted to inquire about were beginning to catch on.

"You mean, there used to be many refugee houses outside the city, but now no one knows where they had disappeared to? Your High -... Shopkeep, be careful!" Xu Ling was talking to the inn manager while staring at *Yan Wang* beside him with trepidation.

They were inside a small pub in the outskirts of Yangzhou. The owner was a retired bodyguard*, surnamed Sun, with an intimidating face and fierce temperament. Any guests that annoyed him even slightly would be kicked out. Luckily, this man was excellent at brewing wine, combined with many visitors from the pugilist world, he was able to continue his business that was on the verge of closing down.

**Bodyguard here was referring to a job from ancient time, their duty is to escort and transport goods from one place to another safely. Like a shipping service.*

No one knew how, but Boss Sun was getting along with *Yan Wang*. The inn had already closed as of this moment. *Yan Wang* was in a good mood, carving a plaque for him on the spot. He was personally stepping on the bench to hang it on the door, the bench was missing one leg, shaking on its own even with no one touching.

Boss Sun laughed aloud and said, "Your shopkeep is very well trained. No need for you to worry your pretty little head. What are you asking about the refugees for? Nowadays, with the foreign dogs occupying Jiangnan, there are many people drifting everywhere. It isn't worth much even if they lay dead all over."

Xu Ling said, "I heard that there are a hundred thousand refugees in Jiangbei. Our host asked us to come and explore the canal coast. We wanted to accommodate these refugees by building factories and took them in as workers. Traveling all the way here only to find so little people, where else are we supposed to find workers?"

Boss Sun had drunk half a kilo of yellow wine, his face was red and his eyes were fluttering. He looked at Xu Ling drunkenly and grinned, showing his yellow teeth and said, "What, want to dig for information from me?"

Xu Ling: "..."

Chang Geng took the hammer and nailed the sign into the entrance of the pub. He leaped down, smiling and shaking his head. The three-legged bench remained motionless from beginning to end. Master Xu grew up reading books, not knowing about the outside world, afterwards, he entered the court to be an official. He had always been inside the capital, how could he know how to deal with these hardened and experienced men in the pugilist world?

Boss Sun looked at Chang Geng and slurred his words, "White dragon in fish clothing, the shopkeeper is not simple."

Xu Ling was breaking into a cold sweat due to fright for a

moment, but Chang Geng took the bottle handed over by Boss Sun without a care and drank half of it, "What is all these talks about white dragon or black dragon, some people are bound to run into ghosts if they walked too much at night. I am that ghost."

Boss Sun looked at Chang Geng in a meaningful way for a long time then laughed, "Why did the Imperial Officer find me?"

Chang Geng had his cover tesr down by someone else, yet his face remained unchanged. "Nothing, just thought that Boss Sun's small pub business is too good. There are only three or two tables of guests every day, but batches of drinks, vegetables and rice were delivered one after another. Can you finish eating them all?"

Boss Sun looked up at him. The drunkenness on his face all but vanished, his eyes shone with malicious intent. Xu Ling was sharp, noticing a fierce-looking short knife hidden under his robe.

Xu Ling suddenly stood up and said, "Your Highness!"

The accountant, waiters, and the people originally dozing off in the restaurant all stood up, each with sharp and bright eyes, their waist seemed to have weapons, all were martial artists.

The two guards of the Black Iron Camp blocked the door one left one right, Xu Ling unconsciously tightened his hand around a sword he kept for self-defense.

Chang Geng put the bottle gently on the table, making a clicking sound: "On the way here, I was thinking, where could one hide this many refugees? The worst case scenario is that Yang Rong Gui has gone completely mad that he gathered all the refugees together under the name of the epidemic and killed them all in a pit."

Boss Sun grinned fiercely and said, "Your Highness *Yan Wang* truly understand the minds of the dog officers under your command, worthy of being the leader of all dog officers."

"The leader of all dog officers is my elder brother, not me," Chang Geng said lightly, "but even if Yang Rong Gui was any more insane, if he really forcibly expels and kills the refugees, there will

soon be rebels everywhere already. It is impossible not to alarm the garrison of Jiangbei nearby."

Boss Sun gave him a cold look: "Yang Rong Gui declared that the villages to settle the refugees had been built. They run along with the hill. He wanted to take the refugees there to open up the wasteland, started farming and settling down slowly, then send people to register and issue a number plate to each refugee and distributed them to different villages by the plate. How to distribute land and collect rents were stated clearly. They also allowed a group of refugees to choose their own leader. If you don't want to go, from now on, you can do as you please on your own, there will be no more porridge to receive outside Yangzhou City — sick people will be separated from each other and isolated to another area. Doctors will provide the medicine, every doctor of Yangzhou City will be there that day."

If someone were to come from the pugilist world, more or less involved with some factions, whether it be legal or illegal, there would always be a place for them to go to. Most of those who became refugees were honest and poor people. Their lifelong wish was to have peace, a roof over their heads and food on the table. As long as they could live, that their lives could be improved for the better everyday and have hope for the future, they would never cause trouble.

If Yang Rong Gui said he had build a better shelters on the other side, there would undoubtedly be skepticism from the people. But Yang Rong Gui had explained that they need to cultivate the wasteland and farm by themselves, even assigning the rules beforehand — it definitely sounded a lot more certain. Even if the rent might be higher than the land owner that year, in this precarious situation, it was enough for people to take charge of themselves and follow after him on this path.

Xu Ling was very doubtful as he heard this, he had always assumed Yang Rong Gui was the idling type, eating salary, due to his underling causing an epidemic, he had deceived the higher ups in order to push away the responsibility. Who would have expected that he was quite organized? If he had done so earlier, how would there be so many refugees in Jiangbei?

Xu Ling said, "It is a good idea to open up the wasteland. Since Governor Yang had managed those refugees well, why did he hide the report of the epidemic?"

Boss Sun said with sarcasm, his voice filled with sorrowful coldness, "The officer received the ruler's salary, you truly are carefree and naive, not knowing where the money came from."

Xu Ling was stunned for a while and suddenly responded, "You mean Yang Rong Gui took the money that the court sent down for the epidemic to settle the refugees!"

Xu Ling regretted this remark immediately, what he had just said was simply too bizarre. Sure enough, the next moment, *Yan Wang* and Boss Sun laughed at the same time. Xu Ling blushed and rushed to find a way to mend it: "I just didn't think that Yang Rong Gui had the courage to go this far. The area across the river had been taken by the enemy, it was also right next to the Jiangbei Camp. How could he dare..."

"Jiangbei Camp can't be mobilized freely," Chang Geng muttered. "Once the enemy forces have any abnormal changes, nobody can bear the responsibility. If Yang Rong Gui wants to hide it, Old Zhong would not have the type of vision that could know of the situation on this side."

Boss Sun gave a sneer, disagreeing with his explanation.

"As long as he can control the North station, he can cover the sky with one hand." Chang Geng turned to Boss Sun and said, "Since Brother Sun knows everything so clearly, you must have helped in taking in many of the refugees. My guess is that there are many fishermen in Liangjiang, behind them there is the Sha Hai Group running rampage on both sea and land, I wonder which side does Boss Sun belongs to?"

Xu Ling on the other side did not recognize it at first, but felt that the words 'Sha Hai Group' were very familiar. Suddenly, as he saw Boss Sun turn his head and smile, revealing a horrifying scar from a sword wound from his ear to his jaw. He suddenly remembered that the Sha Hai Group was the force that spread all

over from Jiangnan to Fujian — they were a major bandit group!

Boss Sun was not a bodyguard, but a bandit! The restaurant was not a Xinghua Village, but a place selling steam bun of human flesh filling*!

**A reference to Sun Erniang, a fictional character in Water Margin 水浒传, one of the Four Great Classical Novels in Chinese Literature.*

Xu Ling instantly turned tense, trying to cover for Yan Wang behind him with the power of a scholar who had no strength to tie a chicken, "You... You are…"

Chang Geng put his hands together: "The dog killers could still be the ones who uphold righteousness*, there still exist one with many sentiments in the green woods, I have been disrespectful."

**From a couplet by famous Ming Dynasty poet, Cao Xuequan 曹学佺 (the second verse is "many cold-hearted ones are of scholarly origin".)*

Boss Sun's eyes swept a few Black Iron Camp guards behind him and straightforwardly said, "*Yan Wang* doesn't have to be so over courteous either. This time you all come openly for a visit, secretly exploring for information, at the end of the day, you only want to know how greedy Yang Rong Gui is, where the refugees that have been harmed by him went to, and whether there is a real epidemic. I might as well tell you directly — those people that have been taken to other areas in order to be saved, as soon as the patients arrived, on the first day, each of them received a bowl of medicine to drink. At the end of that same day, at night, there was a big fire that broke out. None of the people inside were able to flee, their bodies and evidences have all been erased. The others had been detained in batches in the so-called ‘mountain village’ or had joined the gang with us brothers."

Chang Geng's face remained unchanged, he said, "If we didn't come, I'm afraid the riot will happen sooner or later."

Boss Sun sneered: "The Officials forced the hands of the people, but then again, when Yang Rong Gui killed the refugees, Jiangbei Camp did not catch wind of it at all. If the refugees rebelled, Jiangbei

Camp would surely move immediately, regardless of whether they could not fight corrupt officials or foreigners, they would still be more than enough to defeat us ordinary people. Yeah, all roads are facing the sky, but none of them is the road to survival."

Xu Ling had seen the reorganization of Jiangbei Camp and witnessed the battlefield along both sides of Jiangnan. As he was about to refute, Chang Geng first raised his hand to stop him.

Chang Geng: "If there is really no way to survive, why should Brother Sun wait here for us?"

Boss Sun: "I am respectfully waiting here, because I only wanted to see if the imperial officials in the court would truly be worth anything or not. If you are the type who only sit above others, rats and snakes in the same den, then even if we must face the gunfire of the Jiangbei Camp, we would still willing to bet our lives and battle to the end! I just don't know if you would dare to come — I can not bring a wolf inside our home. If you wish to investigate, you can take this pretty boy and follow me, leaving all the dogs that follow you behind."

Xu Ling: "Your Highness, you must not!"

Chang Geng laughed and said, "I cannot ask for more, please."

Boss Sun puts his hands together: "This way."

After he finished, he took the lead in stepping out. He suddenly turn back and look at the plaque carved by His Highness *Yan Wang* for the pub where the human meat steamed buns were sold. The old bandit's face finally moved, on it was carved simply the four words — 'Thousand Years of Justice'.

If someone saw the '*Yan Wang*' in the manor of the Governor of Liangjiang at this time, they would certainly be startled.

The '*Yan Wang*' that was graceful in front of others, as soon as the door was closed, instantly became a blockhead showing off his appearance. It was none other than Cao Chun Hua and his extraordinary disguise.

Governor Yang treated them quite well. The room was graceful and luxurious. There were several small objects burning *Ziliujin* and a Western mirror in the interior as tall as a person, the entire body can be seen while standing in front of it. Only then did '*Yan Wang*', who just now stood outside like a pine tree, twisted his hip and swayed in, twisting his long legs into a strand. Standing at the Western Mirror, he looked left and right, winking, raising his eyebrows for about a moment and holding his face, seeming to not have enough no matter how long he looked.

'Xu Ling' at the side resembled a wooden man, and lowering his eyes, there was no telling whether he had truly became wooden or not, he did not look at the other man.

'Yan Wang' sighed and complimented incessantly, "There's no need to mention anything else, just my big brother's face alone, I cannot have enough no matter how much I touch."

'Xu Ling' sneered, "Go touch the real thing if you have the courage."

"I am the real thing," said '*Yan Wang',* nodding in satisfaction and raising his chin. "Good enough to replace the real thing. Why did he not allow me perfect it? Since the Marquis also came along, let me mold one out as well. Why did he have to go straight to Jiangbei under the excuse of avoiding suspicion?"

'Xu Ling' said, "Not letting you mold it was for your own good, for fear that you might profane Marshal Gu's face, at that point you will be chopped alive by the Black Iron camp."

'Yan Wang' glared and no longer paid him any mind, concentrating on admiring his masterpiece of a face in the mirror.

Suddenly, an attendant came and said, "Your Highness, Master Xu, Governor Yang wish to see you for an important matter, he is waiting outside."

'Yan Wang' and 'Xu Ling' looked at each other. '*Yan Wang*' said in a hushed tone, "We already finished our act, the guests and hosts had also enjoyed the time spent together. The next step should be to pull us on their boat with bribes, right? There must be boxes of gold and silver and beauties waiting outside. Female beauties are whatever, but can the male beauties stay? Our elder brother told us to keep the physical evidence well, but he didn't say what to do if there are human evidence."

'Xu Ling' looked back at Yan Wang's incredibly handsome face with deep facial features, accompanied by the words 'Male Beauties' spoken with drools, giving him a stomach ache, but before he could make a sarcastic remark, there was a sudden rush of footsteps outside. The guards in the courtyard shouted for them to stop, but the visitors rushed in regardless. A series of sounds of soldiers clashing could be heard.

'Xu Ling's' face changed dramatically, he whispered, "Did we show an opening? Or..."

The voice was still in the air, the shameless expression of '*Yan Wang*' just now suddenly turned grave, appearing much like the real thing.

He stepped forward, pushed open the door, put the hands in his sleeves behind his back and looked down at the people who had broken into their place in full armor and weapons, with Yang Rong Gui as the leader.

"Governor Yang, what is the meaning of this?" '*Yan Wang*' asked, and behind him, 'Xu Ling' placed his hand on his waist imperceptibly, ready to rush out and create a path to escape if their identities were to be uncovered.

Who would have expected that at the next moment, Yang Rong Gui, with raging murderous intent, suddenly stepped forward, knelt on the ground and said loudly, "Your Highness, this lowly official was

worthless and incompetent. The local bandits had rebelled and blocked the communication route from Yangzhou Prefecture to Jiangbei Camp. I was forced to gather up all the guards and soldiers from the nearby cities, we pledge to protect Your Highness with our lives! The situation is critical. Please make preparations for transportation."

'Yan Wang' looked back at 'Xu Ling', 'Xu Ling' made a movement of shaking his head that was hard to detect, he had not yet known what play Yang Rong Gui was putting on here, 'Yan Wang' had to temporarily respond, "I already know of this. Governor Yang stand up…"

Yang Rong Gui, however, turned a deaf ear to him and continued to say aloud, "There is still one more matter; the cutrent Emperor is dim and incompetent, the land of the ancestors is on a declining path, with frequent internal and external troubles. On the outside, there are preying foreigners, on the inside, there are rebel mobs of commoners, but the soldiers everywhere lack a leader. This Yang is willing to take the risk of bearing this grave sin and imitate his predecessors - supporting Your Highness to become the Emperor!"

As he finished, the ranks behind him split in two. Four people came out carrying a set of clothing on their shoulders. '*Yan Wang*'s' eyes almost came out of their sockets. It was actually a false Dragon Robe good enough to replace the real thing!

Yang Rong Gui: "I have dedicated my all to Great Liang. As the country is in danger, I did not hide any property for myself, selling my own home in order to give to the country. A little of my family wealth, together with my wife's dowry, they have all been handed over to the court in exchange for Feng Huo tickets, but I was still under that incompetent Emperor's suspicion. It truly is an injustice for thousands of years. If a true wise ruler descends on earth, I vow to assist him with my own life!"

These words echoing pridefully, seeming to straightforwardly express himself, but in fact, it contained three layers of coercion and threats:

Firstly — *I am corrupt and had committed illegal deeds. All of them*

were because I was forced to by your Feng Huo tickets. I am guilty, Yan Wang you are the who started it all.

Secondly — *there may be a bandit riot, there may be not, but if I say they are rioting, then they* are *rioting.*

Thirdly — *don the royal robe on your body, or 'die in the uprising of the refugees', Your Highness can make your choice!*

When coming here, the real *Yan Wang* only told them to delay as much as possible with this traitor surnamed Yang. He did not tell them that there would be such a thing!

A pair of counterfeit chief and deputy inspector were stunned in place by fear for a moment.

After a long while later, 'Xu Ling' took a deep breath and shouted, "Governor Yang, are you out of your mind rebelling like this. The Marquis of Order is still in Jiangbei Camp. You think that tens of thousands of elite soldiers of Great Liang are dead men?"

Yang Rong Gui smiled and said with profound implication, "Master Xu had said too much, how could an underling dare to entertain the idea of rebellion? But the Emperor had already been killed by a Dong Ying assassin. At present, the country is in danger, the Prince is still young, us subjects have to make such a decision, inviting Your Highness to ascend the throne.

Notes:

*More about Sun Erniang, in Water Margin, she and an accomplice operated a tavern and targeted travellers, making them unconscious then robbing and killing them, and sometimes used their flesh to make fillings for steamed bun which they then serve to other unsuspecting customers. The Sun in her name is the same with Boss Sun.

Chapter 92: Drifting

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Go back to General Zhong, tell him to lend me some Eagle Armors, I will return them when I'm done. Hurry.

—

Whether it was Gu Yun, Zhong Chan, or even the entire Great Liang Army, no one had absolute confidence about naval battle, thus they must bring out their best to respond. First, they followed the young genius Ge Chen of Ling Shu to dismantle the Western Dragon. From the aspects of speed, defense, artillery, and *Ziliujin* carrying capacity, they analyzed the operational habits of the Western Navy from beginning to end and the possibility of changes they might have on the battlefield.

When the two armies came into an unavoidable confrontation, there were thousands of large and small dragons. It was quite different from when they fled on the river with twenty people. Anything was possible.

How to fight in certain situations, many things seemed to require only flexible reaction during battle, but in reality, these were all dependent on the innumerable experiences and efforts of the commander from behind. Moreover, they must also discuss the direction of development of the Great Liang Navy in the future, how to prepare, what kind of warship should they request from Ling Shu Institute, how to train the soldiers, how to distribute *Ziliujin*, so on and so forth.

Gu Yun's situation here was a little more complicated. He was ordered to command the four borders. Besides the battlefield in Jiangnan, he had to consider many other aspects.

Every day, he followed the patrol station around Liangjiang to feel the situation of the battlefield. At night, he returned to alternatively discuss with either old General Zhong or Mayor Yao. Since Chang Geng left, he had always been on the move, busy to the point of not having a moment to drink water.

Today as Gu Yun stood up to say goodbye to Yao Zhen, his legs suddenly became numb, his body swaying and his heart beating like a drum. Yao Zhen quickly supported him: "Marshal, what's wrong?"

"It's all right, just hungry," Gu Yun said with a slight self-mockery, laughing at him. "To tell you the truth, right now if you were to bring me a pancake as big as a cart pulled by a donkey, I could still swallow it whole."

Yao Zhen frowned. Gu Yun must not be able to see his own face now. They all described young people as ‘overflowing with vigor’. A person’s spirit was all on their face. Whether they were healthy or not, one could tell by looking at their cheeks and lips.

Yao Zhen said, "Marshal should come to my place today. My wife has no other hobbies, she only loves cooking. Let me ask her to prepare some porridge and vegetable dishes for you. There is no luxurious delicacy, but home-cooked meals that are hot and delicious, we don't lack any."

If Gu Yun heard this before, he would have instantly followed along for a free meal, but he did not know what problems he had recently — the more tired he was, the more he could not eat, only wanting to find a place to fall asleep. He replied, "Thank you. How about another day, it's already very late now. It's not appropriate to trouble Madam."

It was not convenient for Yao Zhen to persuade more, he accompanied Gu Yun all the way back to the tent, not feeling reassured. In the end, he said: "Preserving the green hill, there will be no fear of lacking firewood. Marshal should take care of yourself more."

"Enough to pass the winter, don't worry." Gu Yun waved his hand, raised his head and moved his stiff neck. Suddenly, he caught sight of the river of stars in the sky flowing like satin. He said with emotion, "I remember that year, although Brother Chong Ze was brilliant, you were not ambitious, not wanting to take credit for even such great merit as settling the uprising of *Wei Wang*. You preferred to live a stable life in this one acre of your own house — but now you have also been pushed to this point, fate truly toyed with people."

Yao Zhen said with a bitter laugh: "There are too many factions fighting among each other in the court. I am only a scholar with no power and influence. Why should I follow along with them to add more fuel to the chaos? How much benefit can there be from plotting and calculating? It's better to stay in this place far away from the Emperor, where the entire family of young and old and all around, not having to worry about food and drink, even my words are worth something in the local area, Is it not good luck?"

Yao Chong Ze was too smart, he was even more excellent in pursuing profits and avoid disadvantages. As early as when *Wei Wang* rebelled, he had soon recognized the declining path hiding behind the false pretense of prosperity of the Great Liang Dynasty, he was not willing to sell his life for the ruined court, only carrying with him an official position that was neither big or small, waiting to die with a belly full.

Unfortunately, at present, there were no whole eggs under an overturned nest, he could no longer hide his talents.

Gu Yun refused to let it go and asked, "What about after the war ended?"

Yao Zhen answered with vigor, "If the country is peaceful then, there will no longer be any place where I can be of use. If the court is still engulfed in thick miasma like this, why should I add more to it? Marshal Gu holds the Black Tiger emblem in your hand, is it truly happier than that year when you were young, returning victorious from the South, enjoying flower wine* with us idlers?"

**drinking in the company of prostitutes.*

Gu Yun: "..."

Yao Zhen seemed to have recalled something and laughed: "I still remember clearly even now, when Marshal Gu was drunk, you have stepped on a thin railing with one foot, swaying, holding an embroidered sword used for dancing to carve embroidery letters on the fallen petals in the air, making the beauties blush, even now it remained a grand story…"

Gu Yun was so embarrassed that he almost knotted his tongue: "Back then I was a child, not understanding anything. This nonsensical matter, please don't… don't bring it up again in the future."

Yao Zhen smiled unconsciously, then looked towards the South and said, "One day when Jiangnan is recovered, I will be the host, inviting the general to get drunk in the spring breeze. You must come."

Gu Yun thought, "*I dare not. Having one person like that in the family is already enough.*"

However, it was inconvenient to confess such embarrassing words in the face of an old friend, Gu Yun can only show an unfathomable smile.

In the middle of the night, when the two of them were not embarrassed to talk about entertainment, Ge Chen suddenly ran over with a pale face, holding a piece of sea grain paper in his hand: "Marquis, it's not good, Yang Rong Gui is going to rebel!"

This letter came from the false *Yan Wang*. Fearing that the wooden bird would be caught by the bad guys, he did not dare to mention the matter of real and false *Yan Wang*, nor to reveal that this letter of only a few words was to be sent to Jiangbei Camp, he was only seeking for help. Saying that they have temporarily stabilized the traitors, but did not know what Yang Rong Gui would do to them next.

Gu Yun and Yao Zhen were both stunned at the same time. Gu Yun did indeed assume that when Yang Rong Gui could not bribe the imperial envoys, he would resort to this method. But he had been in charge of the Black Iron camp for a long time, he somewhat did not take these local forces into account. He thought that twenty personal guards were enough to sweep the Yangzhou Capital. Chang Geng was not the type to overdo things.

Gu Yun raised his hand and took Ge Chen's paper, only seeing that the handwriting on it was not Chang Geng's, appearing to have been written in a hurry, but above it all, the content caused one to be

more frightened the more they read, especially at the end: *the Emperor was assassinated, it was unsure whether he is dead or alive.*

Gu Yun's thoughts turned quickly, instantly breaking in a cold sweat. Holding *Yan Wang* in the South and assassinating the Emperor in the capital. This was not impossible to achieve if there was enough thorough calculation, as long as one had the guts to do it.

If Lin Yuan Pavilion had not been secretly involved, there were still Lin Yuan wooden birds that could still fly out. At present, Yangzhou City was isolated, all news was basically blocked. Yang Rong Gui could make his underling forcibly escort *Yan Wang* to the north, it would not even disturb Jiangbei Camp.

What's more, once Li Feng had died and the throne was vacant, it would be worth considering.

Yao Zhen: "Marshal?"

"Go back to General Zhong, tell him to lend me some Eagle Armors, I will return them when I'm done. Hurry." Gu Yun already forgot his exhaustion from just now. He quickly said, "Xiao Ge stays here and tries to contact the capital to see what is going on. I'll take people to Yangzhou."

The false '*Yan Wang*' and 'Xu Ling' were packed up by Yang Rong Gui at this time, 'invited' to get on their boat and left Yangzhou Prefecture with their army, moving to the north to force the Emperor to abdicate.

Their travel was very secretive. From the great epidemic in Jiangnan that did not cause any rumors, it was clear how much control Yang Rong Gui and his traitorous party had over the posts along the canal.

In the evening, at a post stop, '*Yan Wang*' and 'Xu Ling' must stay in the same room. The bodyguards beside them had already been

taken care of. The outside was filled with Yang Rong Gui's eyes and ears, they could not escape even if they grow wings.

It was not until the middle of the night that '*Yan Wang*' looked out of the window. When he saw the guards had loosened a little, he touched his face and lowered his voice to Xu Ling and said, "If I knew it was such a difficult job. I might as well stay at the barbarians. This time, *Yan Wang* owes me a lot of favor — we don't even know if the wooden bird could arrive at Ge Ban Xiao's hands, we also involved the young master like this. If your father knows, he must be very worried."

'Xu Ling' was about to reply when suddenly, his face turned solemn. Somehow, a few guards at the back door all fell down. With absolutely no sound, a dark shadow flies in.

All the weapons for self-defense on 'Xu Ling's' body had soon been confiscated, he grabbed a porcelain cup on the table and threw it out with a strong force. The visitor gently tilted his face, avoiding this weapon by a hair, then reached out and rolled the porcelain cup into his sleeve then crept in silently from the back window. His body was incredibly agile, even after this string of actions, the windchime had not made a single sound.

When the visitor landed, he pulled off his face mask and gestured, "It's me."

It was Gu Yun.

'Xu Ling' had never met Gu Yun before, he was stunned, only '*Yan Wang'* took in a breath of cool air, joy showing on his face.

Gu Yun actually thought something was amiss. The cup Xu Ling had thrown carried too much power, but right now there was no time to think about it. He carefully looked outside, frowned, and quickly signed, "*How did it come to this? Where are the personal guards*?"

Before the sign language was finished, 'Yan Wang' had rushed towards him like a swallow returning to the woods, with beautiful steps that inspired praises in others.

Gu Yun had a sharp nose unknowing to outsiders. Within three feet of a person's body, he could detect if there was something wrong by scent. Instead of the perennial soothing fragrance, the '*Yan Wang*' in front of him did not have the years-long scent of tranquilizer but an imperceptible smell of makeup powder. Gu Yun suddenly stepped backward and grasped the throat of '*Yan Wang*': "Who are you?"

'*Yan Wang*' did not expect to already reveal himself as soon as they came face to face. Frustrated with his immense failure, he fluttered his hands and feet and signaled with his lips: "Uncle Shiliu, it's me."

The only people who called Gu Yun 'Uncle Shiliu' were the two children Ge Chen and Cao Chunhua brought back with Chang Geng from Yanhui town, although after growing up, they no longer referred to him as such.

Gu Yun loosened his hand and said in astonishment, "Xiao Cao?"

On this side, they secretly joined hands with each other, there was no information regarding the whereabouts of the true Yan Wang. At the same time, on the third day of July, a secret letter from Yangzhou City passed through the Ninth Gate of the Imperial City and arrived at Lu Chang's hand.

After reading, Lu Chang could not hold back his joyous laughter, gathering with trusted people to discuss secret matters while sending an invite for Lord Fang Qin.

The Fang and Lu Manors were not far apart. The family servant soon returned, "My lord, Fang family said that Master Fang had contracted a severe illness recently. He had a rash all over his body and a high fever. He is about to move to a house in the outskirts of the capital, it is inconvenient for him to receive any guests. Your servant saw that their courtyard had prepared carriages, their bedsheets and clothing were being burned in the backyard."

Lu Chang asked, "Does Master Fang have any words for me?"

"Yes," the family servant responded respectfully, "Master Fang asked me to give you the best of wishes, achieving your desired success."

Lu Chang sneered, waved for him to retreat and turned into the study. "Fang Qin this old fox, he has many vile ideas in his mind, all mighty when instructing the people around him, like drawing the rivers and mountains. As soon as something happened, he reverts to his usual habit and shrinks back his neck like a turtle. In this life, he only has the ability of a Dog Head Army Master. Never mind him, now our grand plan was already accomplished more than half. Everything is ready, the only thing left is the East Wind."

The rash-covered 'Dog Head Army Master' that Lu Chang mentioned just burned his clothes and quilts, going to the northern suburbs on a small and very ordinary palanquin. Shen Yi who also snuck out in secret much like him happened to be in the Northern Camp. When hearing Master Fang, the one who no one knew which side he had placed his precious buttocks on, was coming to visit, he was in shock.

The new commander of the Northern Camp was one of Tan Hong Fei's deputy generals. Knowing that this was not a trivial matter, he immediately whispered advice, "General Shen, please avoid it for the time being. Let me meet this man."

That day, Fang Qin stayed at the Northern Camp for more than an hour. No one knew what he had said. Only until it was dark that he silently left on his small palanquin.

At the end of July, Long An Emperor's birthday was just around the corner.

Since Li Feng ascended the throne, he had never thrown a large banquet for his birthday, the Empress Dowager died early in the palace, and after the death of the former emperor, he no longer has any elders left to take care of this.

However, this year's birthday, Li Feng finally had some movement.

The Qi Yuan Tower that collapsed during the war was rebuilt in its original location. Li Feng believed that the appearance of the 'Picking Star Platform' was too ominous and the wasteful luxury of 'Yunmeng Grand View' affected heaven's goodwill. Thus he ordered a restructuring to transform 'Qi Yuan Tower' into 'Qi Ming Altar', abolishing the original function of eating, drinking, and entertainment and turning it into a righteous altar for praying to the heaven. The Supervisor had also been moved in.

No one knew whether Emperor Long An had nothing else to do or was persuaded by the bad guys, he decided to go to the newly built Qi Ming Altar to worship the heavens and ancestors, confessing all his sins to celebrate his birthday.

...Speaking of it, Li Feng's underlings consisted of only corrupt officials and ministers devoting themselves to gnawing at his society and eating away at his nation. He himself was fated for a life of hardship with no one loving him, there was no one to even make him a bowl of noodles on his birthday, even having to put all his mistakes in governing on display for everyone in the world to see.

This sorrowful and depressing, but aside from the group of white beard rotten worms in the court, there was no one behind that would praise him — it truly was a human tragedy.

When the Emperor left the palace, all officials would naturally accompany him. The imperial army opened its way and marched to the Qi Ming Altar. The imperial sensory was awaiting, dressed in proper costumes, the sounds of the bells ringing all over the city.

There were 1000 stone steps leading to the top of the Qi Ming altar, and a narrow path in the middle was the 'Imperial Road', only for the Son of Heaven to walk on. On both sides was the 'Royal Road'

accompanied by the officials, which only led to 500 steps and stopped halfway to the altar.

Emperor Long An picked up his feet from the Royal Road, the lower ranks of the hundred civil and military officials saw him off from below. Accompanying him to the top were two ministers, one martial and one civil. But both Gu Yun and Yan Wang were not in the capital at this time, the accompanying passengers had to be replaced by Jiang Chong of the Grand Council and Shen Yi, the Southwest Governor, who happened to be in the capital.

Li Feng was always busy, neglected horse riding and shooting, wearing the overwhelmingly heavy Emperor's attire, it was quite difficult to climb those 1000 steps. As he walked along, his mind was suddenly in a daze, remembering something from his childhood.

It was Gu Yun's first time going along with the Old Marquis's faction to the South to eliminate bandits and returned victorious. Li Feng followed the former emperor as a Crown Prince and welcomed the army back to the court.

Li Feng remembered the young general's vigor when he left, his face bearing a somewhat arrogant childishness. When he returned from the battlefield, his whole appearance seemed to have aged up to ten years. The facial features had not been sharpened by the years, but the eyes that seemed to be in a daze due to being unable to see well had begun to sink down, resembling a true Wind Slasher, looming faintly with an awe-inspiring aura.

He dismounted from his horse, shouting '*Long live the Emperor*!' together with all the officers and generals. The armor on his body was shining like fish scales in the sunshine. Li Feng seldom got to accompany the former emperor outside the palace. He looked at Gu Yun in armor with admiration. Taking advantage of when the commander of the army at that time was conversing with the Emperor, Gu Yun suddenly raised his head, winking towards the Crown Prince who had not yet reached the age of twenty, smiling at each other as they exchanged a look.

Now, Li Feng was on the Qi Ming Altar, remembering this old event from the past, his lips could not help but lift in a smile. He

came back to his senses, looked back and saw countless people kneeling down below the stone steps. There were only heads wherever he looked, the two accompanying him were also well-behaved, nobody dared to raise their heads to offend him...

Perhaps there no longer existed in this world the young man who would wink at him. Li Feng's heart suddenly gave birth to the loneliness of a ruler at the top.

The Imperial Astronomical Bureau was ready for the ritual of worshipping the heavens. He was clearing his throat to open his mouth. Suddenly, there was a disturbance under the altar.

Li Feng wanted to display his own sins, but also wanted to make a name for himself as diligent and caring for the people. On this day, the capital did not completely enforce martial law, only used the imperial army to separate the people on both sides of the road. There were countless people who came to join in on the fun. As soon as a commotion broke out, something happened.

A group of masked men suddenly rushed out of the crowds of spectating people, their movement like the wind, tearing a hole in the defense line of the imperial army in the blink of an eye and rushed straight to the prayer altar.

"Be careful!"

"It's the Dong Ying people!"

Hundreds of officials were in disorder. Liu Chong Shan, the commander of the imperial army, shouted '*Protect the Emperor*!' and rushed directly to the Imperial Road of the altar in a hurry. He knelt down beside Li Feng and said quickly, "Your Majesty, this place is dangerous. I will escort you away at once."

Li Feng could not breathe from anger, kicking Liu Chong Shan's shoulder: "Incompetent!"

Liu Chong Shan suddenly raised his head and his eyes glinted with murderous intent. Several of the imperial guards following Liu Chong Shan all drew their swords at the same time. Li Feng was

shocked, suddenly coming to a realization — there were no assassins in the first place. It was basically a rebellion. This tactic was similar to that of the former Emperor at that time, letting the barbarian consort harm the Black Iron Camp!

Li Feng was both startled and enraged, pointed at Liu Chong Shan and said, "How courageous! You would dare!"

Liu Chong Shan, with a low laugh, stood up and swept the dust off his shoulders and approached Li Feng. "Your Majesty, for your sake, you'll have to be escorted out of this chaotic place."

Chapter 93: Rebellion

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Fang Qin buried his head low. At an angle where others could not detect, his lips revealed a slight smile.

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Liu Chong Shan just finished, a 'Dong Ying assassin' had broken through the Imperial Army and boldly rushed towards the imperial road. Liu Chong Shan grinned and pulled out the sword on his waist, pointing to Li Feng: "Your Majesty rest assured, I will not let them touch even one of your hairs."

There was a scream behind Li Feng. He looked back in a hurry and saw that the officer who was overseeing the ceremony was killed by the assassin, the blood on his neck poured down the stone steps.

This horrifying scream was like a command. Liu Chong Shan immediately swung his sword down. Li Feng did practice martial arts for several days as a child. Unfortunately, with no talent for it, his ability was very ordinary, neglecting for many years, he had soon returned everything he learned to his Master. In order to avoid it, he took several steps back in a panic, stumbling over the stone steps without paying attention. Everywhere his hands touched was hot blood, the sacrificial attire immediately stained.

In this situation, if it were to be replaced with a timid person, they would pass out from fright. But thanks to the hard-headed and stubborn personality of Emperor Long An, not only did he not faint, he even dared to point at Liu Chong Shan and burst into a rage, "Traitorous subject, are you not afraid of punishment coming down on your entire family!"

The Son of Heaven did not have three heads and six arms. With no one here to protect him, did he not stretch his neck out to be cut? Liu Chong Shan missed his first slash, a little fear of rebellion in his heart has already vanished, pursuing him to the end: "Then for the sake of my entire family of young and old, I shall charge forward without turning back!"

Under the sword, the Son of Heaven was still a mortal body of flesh and blood. The wind brought by the sword slash coming down on his head, Li Feng cannot avoid it, but still refused to insult his royal lineage, he was silent, but his heart was filled only with sorrow — he did not die from his brother who wanted to seize power and usurp the throne. He did not die in the siege of the Western Army. Now that the country was starting to stabilize, wanting to rest and recuperate, he would die in the hands of his traitorous underlings... he did not even know the reason for why they rebelled.

At that moment, a strong wind came from the side, sweeping by the tip of Li Feng's nose. The steel blade in Liu Chong Shan's hand which almost injured the dragon body was hit by a two-and-a-half-inch *Xiu zhong si.* At last, Shen Yi, who accompanied him had arrived.

The generals who accompanied the Emperor on the altar did not carry swords, their armor was only for show. No one expected that Shen Yi's iron wrist bracelet had a *Xiu zhong si.*

Liu Chong Shan saw how close he was to succeeding, but was suddenly interfered by Shen Yi. He could not help but cursing inside. Before he came, Lu Chang had said it clearly — he already tried to test the reaction of Shen's family, they would not cause any trouble. They would only shrink back and watch on like the surname Fang, why did this suddenly happen?

Shen Yi stooped down and helped Emperor Long An up. He and Jiang Chong, who had trotted all the way with their robes, surrounded him in the middle, appearing very isolated and helpless in this moment. Only in difficulty could one see loyalty and treachery. Li Feng's heart was full of mixed feelings for a moment, he lamented awkwardly, "The two subjects have a heart."

Jiang Chong did not know martial arts and was somewhat nervous. General Shen, however, was the one who returned from the southwest with an army of defeated soldiers to relieve the capital. His face remained unchanged: "Your Majesty does not need to worry. There are many people here today. In order to prevent accidents, many lords have sent their family guards to mix up with the crowd of commoners, it will be enough to deal with this. Even if I was any more useless, I can still clean up this young masters army, protecting

Your Majesty thoroughly."

A while ago, Fang Qin secretly went to the Northern Camp with a letter from his sister sent to his Mother*. The things mentioned in the letter were very frightening.

**The word here refers to a mother who is the illegitimate wife of his father.*

A young girl who had just been bought by the Fang lady to serve as a maid accidentally broke into the study room from not knowing the rules and was beaten to death. Yet this was not the most frightening thing, even the Fang lady who was married properly got confined to the inner courtyard for this trivial matter and had to appeal to her mother's family for help. The letter mentioned that there were many guests that day, including Liu Chong Shan, the commander of the Imperial Army.

It also happened that Emperor Long An had just announced that he was going out to offer sacrifices to the heavens on his birthday. Such coincidence could not help but make one think.

However, after all, this was only a vague home letter, which could not be used to reported to the Emperor - otherwise, if nothing happened, would it not become an accusation based around rumors?

Li Feng hated forming parties and fighting among each other. The reason as to why the Imperial Censorate had been humiliated by the Emperor many times was due to them unable to bring forth any true accusation towards Yan Wang.

Nobody dared to take the risk rashly.

However, the Northern Camp was not allowed to enter the palace unless summoned. If an accident were to happen when the Emperor left, water from far away will not be able to put out this fire.

Thus Fang Qin came up with an idea to let the Northern Camp wait outside the nine gates. Once there was a disturbance, they could force their way into the city and come to rescue in an incense time. Before that, they borrowed a group of powerful generals from

military families such as the Shen's and the Marquis's manor. They would also be mingled with the spectating crowd. In case of an accident, they only needed to prolong it for a while to wait for the rescue of the Northern Camp.

Although Shen Yi did not like Fang Qin very much, he had to admit that the old man did things very thoroughly.

Liu Chong Shan could not bear to look at Shen Yi's leisurely appearance. He sneered and said, "Then allow me to observe the General's skills!"

After that, several rebels in the imperial army together with the assassins rushed up behind him. The officers Fang Qin arranged in advance came back to their senses and ran up to the altar on both sides, beginning to clash with the rebels.

Shen Yi pulled Li Feng behind him, grabbed an assassin's wrist and broke his arm, taking the sword with a strange shape in the hand of the assassin. The heavy Dong Ying blade then lightly bounced out of his palm and cut right into Liu Chong Shan's face.

"Observe my skills?" Shen Yi shook his head and sighed like a good old man. "I'm afraid Commander Liu doesn't have what it takes."

Liu Chong Shan and Shen Yi were both descendants of noble family. Growing up with the grace of their ancestors. Graduated in the same year, the difference was Shen Yi went with literary, while Liu Chong Shan followed the true school of martial arts. Later, he entered the imperial army by the influence of his family background. With incredible glory, why would he ever put Shen Ji Ping, who had never had a proper career, in his eyes?

But in the past few years, the imperial army was full of young master soldiers, Liu Chong Shan had endured hardship until now, honing his experience and finally becoming a small commander. What the hell was that Shen Yi? He was only a mechanic serving royalty who changed his career halfway through, stepping on a pile of feces and getting on the boat of the Gu family by chance, yet he managed to become a Governor in the end.

Liu Chong Shan laughed angrily, his eyes almost flashing red. Making a long whistle, more rebels came up from under the altar, the civilians watching on both sides all tried to flee.

Liu Chong Shan: "All legends say that thirty of Black Armors can stabilize the Eighteen Tribes of the barbarians. I don't know how many nails can General Shen twist with his mortal body?"

At this time, the scream of heavy steel armor came from below. Several Heavy Armors tore open the defense line and surrounded the retreating emperor and the guards in the formation of a fan. The killer snow-white steam spurted up to the sky without bending.

Since the reign of Emperor Wu, the machines and steel armor carried by the guards in all parts of the country have been standardized, they were absolutely not allowed to overstep the rules. The Imperial Army was the only unique exception who received Heavy Armors. But now, the ferocious dog raised by royalty had finally turned around to devour its master.

Shen Yi carefully guarded the stolen Dong Ying knife across his chest, hoping that the Northern Camp would arrive quicker.

After such an interruption, Li Feng had became calmer. He took off the blood-soaked robe and threw it away. He went up to him and questioned, "Liu Chong Shan, with your many years of incompetent experience, you were not in a fitting position to take on a major responsibility. Out of respect for the loyalty of Liu family, I had personally promoted you to be the commander of the Imperial Army. I have never mistreated you, yet you would ally with foreigners to repay my grace this way?"

Liu Chong Shan had always been conceited. He always felt that his unfortunate career path was the fault of his incompetent parents and family. Resentful of them, he was never friendly towards his own flesh and blood. Instead, he had a close relation with the Lu family. When he heard Li Feng's meaning that he was not fit for even such a small position as this, he grinned and twisted his words back to him: "What does your majesty write about yourself on the imperial edict? 'Does not have a good judge of character, does not have any merit in ruling, governed for nine years, making many ignorant decisions,

even harming the country and the people.' Since you already said so clearly, why not abdicate and give up the position to someone talented?"

Li Feng almost grinded his teeth to dust, "Then tell me, who am I stepping back for? Giving up the position to whom?"

At the same time, Shen Yi and Jiang Chong were both startled. Shen Yi beat an assassin away. As he was momentarily nervous, the Dong Ying sword which he was not used to handling slipped away directly.

He knew that the old man surname Fang was not so kind!

Liu Chong Shan's words could not help but make one think of *Yan Wang*. This matter could not be pondered about too deeply. Otherwise, Gu Yun would also have to be involved. He did not leave before. Why must he insist on leaving at this time? He departed together with *Yan Wang,* was it because they had conspired this plan beforehand?

Shen Yi's head flashed with several thoughts, cold sweat began to come down. At first, Shen Yi's thoughts were very simple. He felt that *Yan Wang* traveling to the south was only to deal with Yang Rong Gui. Logically, he would not ally with the Lu family's failure of a bunch, that was why whether it was public or private matter, he could not let the traitorous Lu Chang have his way.

Only then did Shen Yi discover that he had been fooled.

Was it really Lu Chang who started everything?

If the Fang lady truly got confined because one of her maids heard something she should not have heard, then how did a young lady like her who grew up behind walls be able to send a letter to the outside?

Generally speaking, people would think that all noble families were linked together, sharing both honor and damage. If the Lu family had their possessions confiscated, their in-laws would not have a good ending either... But what if someone sacrificed themselves for

righteousness?

Fang Qin took a letter from his younger sister and quietly sent it to the Northern Camp, showing his opinion at the critical moment. If the Emperor came out of the accident safe and sound, he would make a great contribution. Just judging by this alone, if the Fang lady was willing to separate with her husband, even if the entire Lu family was executed, his sister could still be saved.

Fang Qin appeared to be helpless, but in fact, he had abandoned the pawn to protect the car, turning the Lu family into a disposable explosive, aiming at *Yan Wang*!

Shen Yi escorting the Emperor in the midst of a rebellious army, suddenly did not know how to end it.

Should he continue to protect the Emperor and wait until the Northern Camp arrived to eradicate the rebels, then kill *Yan Wang* and Gu Yun, or should he immediately turn face for personal selfish reasons and send Li Feng to see the Hell King, branding *Yan Wang* the name of rebellious?

Old Maid Shen had never been in such a dilemma in his life.

As soon as the Dong Ying sword slipped off his hand, Liu Chong Shan seized the opportunity to take a few steps and deliver three slashes in succession. Shen Yi's foot was in disarray, almost getting his belly cut open, he dodged with difficulty. The front of his formal attire was torn in a line.

The Heavy Armor of the rebel approached, a shot of explosive engulfed Qi Ming Altar in black smoke and dust. Jiang Chong shouted behind him, "General Shen!"

Shen Yi reluctantly stood still and turned around, only to see a rebel Heavy Armor killing three generals at once. The short guns had taken aim at Li Feng, preparing to shoot the Emperor to heaven——

Suddenly, there was a sharp, ear piercing sound of an eagle in the air. An iron arrow came down, almost grazing Li Feng's arm, and shot through the golden box in front of the Heavy Armor's chest,

exploding it into fireworks a few feet away. Jiang Chong rushed forward and pushed Li Feng to the ground.

Shen Yi took in a cool breath, his hands and feet were numb. The next moment, he suddenly remembered that the anti air net in the capital had been restored since the Qi Ming Altar was built. Except for the Emperor's command or an order by the Black Tiger emblem, how did that Eagle fly in?

Could it be...Gu Yun was back?!

While Shen Yi's thoughts were still in a mess, three Eagle Armors swept down from the air. Their advantage was obvious, taking care of the assassins around Emperor Long An in a blink of an eye. The leading Eagle Armor landed on the ground. With an iron mask on, one could not tell who it was. He stopped not far away, half-kneeling on the stone steps, helping lift Li Feng up.

At this time, the long-awaited Northern Camp finally arrived.

There was chaos both from below and up on the Qi Ming Altar. The Northern Camp charged into the rebels. Some of those who tried to fish in troubled waters were captured by several Eagle Armors on Li Feng's side.

As soon as he learned that Gu Yun had returned — at least the Black Tiger Emblem had returned, then the Marquis of Order had known about this. Out of his unreasonable trust in Gu Yun, Shen Yi immediately felt more reassured. He caught a Wind Slasher thrown to him by an Eagle and directly slashed off one of Liu Chong Shan's arms, capturing him alive and bringing him in front of the Emperor.

The Imperial Army was defeated by the Northern Camp. In a matter of minutes, the dust settled and the rebel leader was captured.

Li Feng was not so foolish. He knew that there must be someone else behind Liu Chong Shan. He immediately ordered to blockade off all the city gates and prepared for a thorough investigation.

The blood on his body was still wet, but his face did not change for the better even after escaping danger. Li Feng glanced at the

ironic clothes of the Imperial Army on the corpses of the rebels laying everywhere. He thought of the important ministers involved who would not be able to escape this and the words 'handing the throne to the talented' spoken by Liu Chong Shan, feeling like two ice thorns had pierced through his chest.

Li Feng could not contain such a trivial question as 'how did Eagle Armor enter the capital' in his head for a moment. His mind was full of the word 'betrayal'.

Noble families receiving royal grace for many generations came together to betray him, his trusted Imperial Army betrayed him. Gu Yun who grew up with him, the one he just reminisced about, had betrayed him, and even his blood-related little brother.

How many shocking things did *Yan Wang* do after he entered the court? Since the establishment of the Grand Council, the papers that accused *Yan Wang* had never stopped coming, just like the routine letters of regards. It was all single-handedly suppressed down by him.

Towards his overly talented little brother, Li Feng did not feel relieved — he was doubtful, or even jealous of him, but he had never touched a single strand of Li Min's hair, he felt that he had already did his best, but in the end, did he only raise a traitorous wolf who wanted his life?

Jiang Chong saw that Li Feng's face was unusual. He quickly whispered, "Your Majesty, there are many people here, let us go back to the palace first."

Li Feng looked at him blankly, taking two steps, then suddenly bent over, his fingers grasp for something in the air, and vomited a mouthful of blood.

Around him came several shouts of 'Your Majesty'. Li Feng's ears were buzzing, after a long time, he found that he was grabbing the arm of the Black Eagle who rescued him just now, his blood staining the iron arm of the Eagle's armor red.

This matter was obviously not over yet.

The new leader of the Northern Camp stood quite far away, unable to see that the Emperor had just vomited blood, he did something not suitable in this moment. He came forward with a man and reported, "Your Majesty, this man wanted to secretly leave the city towards the south in the midst of chaos. I have detained him, for fear that there might be something shady."

The man was trembling greatly, casting a glance towards Lu Chang with his eyes from time to time.

At this time, someone confirmed: "Your Majesty, I recognize this man. He was a carriage driver in Officer Lu's house. He waited outside everyday for Lord Lu after the court is dismissed, I saw it with my own eyes."

Lu Chang's face was ashen gray, kneeling onto the ground.

Li Feng steadied himself using the iron shoulder of the Eagle Armor, straightened up his back as best as he could, asking in a hoarse voice, "Subject Lu, who are you trying to inform, sending people out of the city at this time?"

The commander of the Northern Camp relentlessly pressed the Lu family's servant on the ground, pulling his sword out of the sheath at his waist.

The Lu family servant was also a scaredy cat, wetting himself from fright, kowtowing like pounding garlic: "Your Majesty forgive me, Your Majesty forgive me, I was forced to… I was… It was Master Lu, Master Lu secretly instructed me, after the deed at the Qi Ming Altar is done, whether it is success or failure, I will… will leave the capital during the commotion to inform Master Yang…"

Li Feng asked in surprise, "Which Master Yang?"

The man swallowed his saliva: "Uncle... Yang...Master Yang Rong Gui..."

Li Feng tightened the hand that was holding onto the Eagle Armor, his voice rose sharply: "Yang Rong Gui is the Governor of Liangjiang, as a major officer at the border, how dare he enter the

capital without command? Nonsense!"

Servant: "Your Majesty spare my life! Uncle had secretly travelled to the south gate of the capital, waiting for the signal from my lord, as long as...Commander Liu succeeded, he will..."

Li Feng: "Will what?"

Servant: "... Support the new emperor coming to the capital."

Li Feng's eyes darkened. If not for the Eagle Armor at his side supporting him, he would have almost fainted on the spot.

Once again, Shen Yi was puzzled by this unexpected development. If before, he could use the words 'unconfirmed rumor' to help save *Yan Wang*, then what would happen now? Was this evidence conclusive? For a moment, he was confused about whether Gu Yun truly came back or not. There were countless of horrifying possibilities in his mind. His cold sweat soon rusted the armor.

Fang Qin buried his head low. At an angle where others could not detect, his lips revealed a slight smile.

Yan Wang was the blood related brother of the Emperor, he could not be shaken unless it was for the grave crime of rebellion.

It was a rebellion now, was it not?

"Go invite Yang Rong Gui and his new emperor in here," Li Feng gritted his teeth. "I'll have a look at it... "

Chapter 94: Biting

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However, he was relieved too early, this bloody rain was not over yet.

—

As Li Feng was unable to speak, the Eagle Armor next to him finally pushed the iron mask up and showed the earth-shattering face in no hurry: "Your Majesty, the traitorous subjects have all been captured with their hands tied up, you must take care of yourself. The Son of Heaven spared no effort for the people, why must you need to hurt yourself for several rebels?"

The voice was all too familiar. Li Feng turned his head and was instantly stunned. The Eagle who was supporting him all this time was, in fact, Gu Yun who was supposed to be in the south at the moment.

Gu Yun's sudden appearance frightened an entire group of people.

The inside of Lu Chang's head exploded. Yang Rong Gui had assured and vowed to him before that he would be very careful in his actions on that side, even the Marquis of Order had no knowledge of it!

In his original plan, all the arrangements should be completed within the period of *Yan Wang*'s departure from the Capital. Liu Chong Shan was the fool who followed every instruction without fail like a chess piece. As long as he could be persuaded into killing Li Feng, Yang Rong Gui did not have to personally come forward, they only need to ask Liu Chong Shan to push *Yan Wang* out in their stead, at that time, whether it was by *Yan Wang*'s own will or if he was forced by Yang Rong Gui, as long as he appeared, the crime of

rebellion was immediately implemented.

Once the Northern Camp in the suburbs of the capital reacted, it would immediately go to suppress the rebellion, eliminate *Yan Wang* and Liu Chong Shan, they would die in the middle of the rebellious army, there would be no one left for confirmation.

There was no Empress Dowager in the palace. The Empress was a sickly woman who could not go out in the wind, unable to hold even the Phoenix seal. The Prince was still eating milk. The eldest son of Consort Lu was eleven years old. It's self-evident whose hands the country would be in.

Gu Yun was all the way in Jiangnan. When he learned about what was going on, both the Emperor and the 'rebels' were dead, the dust had already settled in the capital. Unless he ignored the dangers of the four frontiers and what the people might say, mobilized the army to fight for justice for two dead people — even a coward like Lu Chang did not believe Gu Yun could do something like that.

If Gu Yun wanted to rebel, he would have already done so as early as the uprising of the Northern Camp, or even earlier, when he knew the truth of the Black Iron Camp that year, otherwise, how could that immortal old man Wang Guo continue his dying breath until now?

There were only two key points in this matter. The first was whether Yang Rong Gui could cut off the communication between the capital city and Jiangbei on his own territory, hide Gu Yun, and the second was whether Liu Chong Shan could smoothly kill Li Feng.

The former had Yang Rong Gui using his life and his family's as guarantee, and the latter should have been even more certain. Who knew that someone had leaked the news, many skilled guards were waiting among the civilians, the Northern Camp arrived ahead of schedule, and Gu Yun fell from the sky!

At this point, even if he was any dumber, Lu Chang would come to realize that among the people he trusted most, someone had betrayed him — it was either Yang Rong Gui or Fang Qin. This time, Yang Rong Gui would not be able to have a good ending either, could

it be Fang Qin?

If it was truly the work of that surname is Fang, then he was too vicious. Leaking their movements to the Northern Camp and dragged in Gu Yun to fish in troubled waters. Not only could he strive for the merit of being the first one to save the Emperor, getting rid of the Lu family right now, from now on, all the big families in the capital could also no longer compete with the Fang.

Lu Chang's mind came to an understanding as he thought about it. He wondered at once, "Had Fang Qin belonged to *Yan Wang* party from the beginning?"

But Fang Qin from '*Yan Wang* party', upon seeing Gu Yun, his face also paled, no longer able to smile.

He thought that with Yang Rong Gui's great ability that could cover the sky with one hand even in the epidemic situation, at least, he could take advantage of when Gu Yun rushed to the front line to carry things out. From beginning to end, his plan did not contain this God of War.

Although with the rescue efforts of the Northern Camp, whether Gu Yun came or not should not affect his arrangements... But somehow, Fang Qin suddenly had a feeling that everything was about to be out of control.

Every person here had their own ulterior motives and intentions, only Shen Yi was relieved to see Gu Yun as if seeing a savior. The cool breeze slipped into his torn up attire and blew directly onto his sweaty skin, making him shiver.

However, he was relieved too early, this bloody rain was not over yet.

Gu Yun handed Li Feng over to an attendant and knelt down on the stone steps. Without waiting for Li Feng to ask questions, he took the lead in reporting in detail: "After Your subject and *Yan Wang* and Master Xu separated at Yangzhou City, I left my guards beside *Yan Wang* and went to Jiangbei Camp to check on military affairs with Ge Ling Shu."

"Unexpectedly, as I was in Jiangbei Camp, I suddenly received a secret letter from a guard seeking for help, saying that Yang Rong Gui dared to raised up soldiers in private, threatening Yan Wang to follow his vile scheme. In urgent need, I had to borrow several Eagle Armors from the garrison of Jiangbei from General Zhong. When I arrived in Yangzhou City, I found that Yang Rong Gui, using the name of calming the riots, has blocked Yangzhou city in a tight circle, leaving no gap for even a fly. I had led my men investigating around for a long time, even sneaked into the governor's manor at night, only to find that this man had deliberately used misdirection, Yang Rong Gui himself has no trace left, and Yan Wang's whereabouts are also unknown."

"I thought of the 'rebellion' mentioned by the guard, fearing that there will be something going on at the capital. I had no choice but to go back first. I failed to properly protect Yan Wang, failing my mission, I ask Your Majesty to punish me."

As these words came out of Gu Yun's mouth, it shocked the surrounding area into silence.

Fang Qin quietly gave Wang Guo a look. Wang Guo understood and cut in: "Your Majesty, there is one thing I would like to consult Marshal Gu... Marshal Gu's Eagle Armor chased all the way from Jiangbei to the capital. How could you not intercept Yang Rong Gui on the way?"

This sentence could be said to be an extraordinary display of intelligence from Imperial Uncle Wang, seemingly unintentional, but in fact, it aroused many doubts in Li Feng — was it Yang Rong Gui who was infinitely skilled, or was it Gu Yun who deliberately let Yang Rong Gui and the others into the capital? Did the Marquis of Order came to the rescue in a flash, or did he have other plans in mind? After coming to the capital, seeing that the Northern Camp soon readied themselves, only then did he change his course of action?

Not to mention the 'missing' *Yan Wang*, if he was really together with the rebels outside the city, was he forced to come along or did he have other inside information that could not be said?

The public's eyes all fell on Gu Yun, but Gu Yun seemed utterly oblivious and calmly replied, "A shame, but I had lost Yang Rong Gui's whereabouts when I received the news. It had taken a very long time to search for *Yan Wang* and the rebel party in Yangzhou City, which almost delayed the bigger matter."

The civil officers present were not able to understand this sentence. Zhang Feng Han, who was supported by two people, cut in at a timely manner: "Your Majesty and the gentlemen do not know, the Eagle Armor is very fast in the sky, it can only search for targets in front of the battle or in a small area. For such a far distance from Jiangbei to the capital, if the proper path of the search is not known beforehand, or if the target is not a large group of people, three or two Eagle Armors wanting to find a person is simply like searching a haystack for a needle."

Nevertheless, as it had already come to this, Fang Qin's party would never let Gu Yun go lightly. Imperial Uncle Wang pressed on, "Then knowing that this is urgent, why didn't Marshal Gu mobilize for more people from Jiangbei Camp?"

Gu Yun glanced at them sideways. From Fang Qin's point of view, the radian of the peach blossom eyes of the Marquis of Order was especially obvious. The corners of his eyes were almost hooked, decorated by a small beauty mark, his eyes appeared as if they were laughing. Fang Qin instantly realized it — Wang Guo had said it wrong, giving himself a slap!

Sure enough, the first sentence was extraordinarily intelligent, this sentence was the true level of Imperial Uncle Wang.

However, even though Gu Yun usually did not argue, he was not at all foolish. At this time, he would definitely not give the old man another chance to repair his mistake.

"Imperial Uncle Wang's meaning is somewhat unclear to me," Gu Yun said unhurriedly, "Is Jiangbei Camp this Gu Yun's private soldiers? I can mobilize them whenever I want? Ignoring the Westerners preying like tigers? I dare ask Uncle, except for His Majesty, who would be able to bring Jiangbei Camp to the capital city in a single word? Please point them out to me, I will kill those

treacherous subjects myself!"

This sentence with hidden murderous intent pulled Li Feng back to his senses. He immediately realized that he was almost brought into the ditch by Wang Guo whose heart was the size of a bean - Gu Yun held the Black Tiger Emblem in his hand. Even if he wanted to rebel, would he follow someone as meager as Yang Rong Gui?

Gu Yun: "Your Majesty, this time, my response was too late. My crime is worthy of a thousand deaths. When I found Yang Rong Gui's traces, I was already near the capital. I learned that *Yan Wang* was probably already captured by the traitor. For fear of affecting the bigger picture, I did not dare to strike the grass and frighten the snakes.

"I originally wanted to ask for help from the Northern Camp. Unexpectedly, they are already waiting outside the Nine Gates, I know something has definitely happened in the capital. It was fortunate that the Northern Camp had been warned by Master Fang in advance, in a hurry, I had to temporarily order the anti-air net to be shut down, and at the same time release the Northern Camp into the city. Thankfully, Your Majesty's blessing is immense, escaping danger unhurt — it was all thanks to Master Fang's thorough preparation."

Fang Qin's face twitched, feeling that the gaze of Lu family's party were burning through him. He had pretended to be sick, acting anonymously from beginning to end. He even let Wang Guo step to the front first in order to keep a low profile, hiding behind others was the safest thing. It was better for Lu Chang to think that he had no involvement in this.

Who would have known that Gu Yun stabbed him with a soft knife and put him directly on the fire to roast. Just now Lu Chang was only speculating with no base. Confirmed his suspicion by this remark, aside from surprise, he also wanted to skin Fang Qin.

Only then did Li Feng know that it was not the Northern Camp that was fast, but that it had been waiting outside the gates for a long time. For a moment, he was even more confused: "What is this matter with the Northern Camp?"

Fang Qin had to put the great surprise that was Gu Yun aside for the time being, together with a General of the Northern Camp, carefully started to talk about the home letter from his younger sister with a glaring Lu Chang at the side. Li Feng was sensitive and suspicious, although Fang Qin was confident that this plan was unpredictable, he was certain he had never left behind any unfavorable evidence, but only one slight mistake could still bring disaster upon himself, thus he had used all his strength to handle this.

The more Li Feng listened, the more frightened he became. Under the Long An reign, there have never been such a wide range of involvements and complicated internal affairs before. The civil and military officials kneeling down dared not breathe out. Northern had temporarily imposed martial law on the side of the street to avoid spreading words that should not be spread into the city.

But Fang Qin's loyalty was not yet done being expressed, the Northern Camp had cleanly captured Yang Rong Gui and his accomplices.

Yang Rong Gui was not able to wait for Lu Chang's news of victory in the appointed place, but he was able to wait for the encirclement circle of Northern Camp. At that time, he knew the grand scheme had been lost. At first, he wanted to take *Yan Wang* as a hostage. Who knew that the newly appointed leader of Northern Camp was selfless, only said that even the suspicion of *Yan Wang* himself had not been cleaned yet, boldly shooting down the traitor holding *Yan Wang* with one arrow, bringing them all into the city regardless of right or wrong.

Except for '*Yan Wang*' from royalty who was given special privileges, the other people were all tied up and brought to the Qi Ming Altar.

Yang Rong Gui had been thinking of how to handle this all the way here, his knees had not yet touched the ground, he already began to shout his grievances before anyone else.

Jiang Chong stepped forward and said, "You allied with the traitors to rebel, do you still have the face to say you have been wronged?"

Yang Rong Gui touched the ground with his head and cried, "Injustice, Your Majesty! I have received the ruler's grace for many generations, how dare I betray Your Majesty. From the very beginning, *Yan Wang* party in the court had slandered me. There are no more than one hundred gold and silver in my family. When the country was in danger, I had exchanged them all for Feng Huo tickets, the matter of corruption and harming the people were all without proof and evidence. If you do not believe me, you can order confiscation of my household possessions! Towards Your Majesty, my loyalty is clear enough for heaven and earth to see, Your Majesty please be my witness!"

Li Feng's voice was so low that it seemed to be squeezed out of his throat: "Oh? If it is as you say, then you're coming here to the capital arbitrarily, the purpose was to provide aid?"

Yang Rong Gui turned face on the spot: "*Yan Wang* party in the court covering the sky with one hand, deceiving the Emperor and forming a party, doing every vile thing possible. Your subject is innocent, being stirred up by the villain, even my brother-in-law, Officer Lu, refuses to believe me. He has written several letters on many occasions to question me, creating the opportunity for the villain to take advantage of, provoked by the treacherous *Yan Wang* party to commit this grave crime. I am far away in Jiangbei, after knowing this, it was too late. In a hurry, I had to detain *Yan Wang* and escort him all the way to the capital."

Li Feng interrupted him, "Who is the villain?"

Yang Rong Gui cried out, "It was Fang Qin, the Minister of Housing, who offered my brother-in-law the plan of 'Royal Robe'!"

Fang Qin angrily retorted, "Your Majesty, the rebels carry hatred in their heart. With no evidence, they are clearly pouring mud on others!"

Wang Guo hurriedly danced along: "If Master Yang really went to the capital for aid, would there be so little people around him? The Marquis had just said that there are officers and soldiers gathered in Yangzhou City!"

Lu Chang cried bitterly, his snot running: "I have been wronged!"

Shen Yi: "..."

The cold sweat on his head was blown away by the cool wind. Watching the biggest dogfight event in all of Long An years, he was dumbfounded from fear. The second layer of cold sweat was busy queuing up. He hardly understood how someone as dizzy as himself had the ability to run through all these overlapping schemes and still come out safely.

Li Feng: "Shut up! Bring me *Yan Wang*!"

The long-forgotten 'Yan Wang' and 'Xu Ling' were pushed to the front of the imperial court. Li Feng looked gloomily at the people in front of him, his voice cold, "A Min, I want to hear from you, what is going on?"

'*Yan Wang*' retracted his shoulders and hunched his neck, shivering into a ball. His once handsome and deep facial features changed, appeared somewhat cowardly, he was frightened into a human-shaped quail.

The others haven't done anything, Zhang Feng Han was the first to feel anxious. He stepped up to push '*Yan Wang*' on the shoulder and urged, "Please say something!"

At this time, something strange happened. The *Yan Wang* who stood on the Black Eagle and shot an arrow at the Dong Ying spy Lao Chi tumbled onto the ground by one push of a senile man old in age, his shoulder on one side becoming deformed.

Everyone was shocked, wondering if it was Master Feng Han who drank Ziliujin or Yan Wang had turned into mud.

For a long time, the commander of the Northern Camp gathered his courage to take a step forward, tentatively touched the deformed shoulder of 'Yan Wang' and replied, "Your Majesty, this thing looks like..."

Li Feng: "What?"

Northern Camp Commander: "... It's a shoulder pad!"

During the conversation, '*Yan Wang*' raised his head, his face was full of tears and snot, his nose and chin were divided into two routes, distorted to the left and right, and the handsome face was completely separated from each other. There was no '*Yan Wang*', it was clearly a devil no one knew where had come from!

The commander was shocked. He pulled the man's outer robe apart quickly and saw that his shoulders, his chest, and his back were stuffed with soft cushions that could be used to replace the real thing. There were at least five or six inches of inner cushions hidden in the boots under his feet. The false nose bridge, false chin, and human skin mask were pulled down. It was clearly a completely strange, short-statured, swallow-headed and rat-like man.

Li Feng had never witnessed such a drastic change in his life. He took a breath of cool air and said, "What are... Who are you?"

Shen Yi felt that for a moment, His Majesty almost wanted to shout "What kind of demon are you?"

The man opened his mouth, but could not speak. The tip of his tongue had been cut off.

Looking at 'Xu Ling' on the side, they could also find the seam of a human skin mask on his scalp by pushing his hair aside.

Lu Chang: "..."

Yang Rong Gui: "..."

These two men were the ones sent by Yang Rong Gui to keep watch on *Yan Wang* and Xu Ling. When did they get their tongues cut and become like this? What about the real *Yan Wang*? Could it be that all these time, the real *Yan Wang* and Xu Ling have been mixed up in his ranks to pretend to be servants!

Yang Rong Gui anxiously turned back to look for them. At the back, in the group of his followers who had been detained by the Northern Camp, two people were missing.

He had no idea when they had gone missing!

For a while, even Fang Qin did not know what to say. Master Fang, with his head full of scheme, could not help but suspect that perhaps Yang Rong Gui had truly separated with Lu Chang's party?

Li Feng could not bear to look at it any longer. As he lifted his legs to walk forward, he found that they have gone numb without him knowing. If it was not for Gu Yun beside him, the Emperor would have lost all his dignified image in front of the people and fallen onto the ground like a dog gnawing at mud.

"Your Majesty," Gu Yun whispered beside him, "Allow me to carry you down on my back."

Li Feng felt a tremor in his heart. When he looked at Gu Yun, he was almost absent-minded for a moment. The man beside him seemed to have remained unchanged for so many years - it was not that Gu Yun still retained the appearance of a young boy in his teens, but it was the look in his eyes.

Over the years, everyone had become deeper and more calculating, only those familiar peach blossom eyes vaguely retained the teasing and romantic aura of the young general secretly smiling at him that year among the crowd of armors.

Li Feng shook his head, refusing to show weakness in the eyes of the public by letting someone carry him. He only supported himself by one of Gu Yun's arms and slowly walked down the broken debris of Qi Ming Altar.

The attendant announced in a sharp voice, "Departing, return to the palace --"

The vast sunset, lingering on the edge of the imperial city, cast the thousands of rows of glazed tiles reflected in a blood red color.

At last it fell.

Chapter 95: Startling Change

—

Gu Yun almost could not breathe.

—

It's bound to be a sleepless night.

Lu family's party was swept away like a storm, all of them were put in prison awaiting trial.

Although Fang Qin and others succeeded in achieving the merit of rescuing the Emperor, they were not implicated for the time being. But this result was quite different from their original plans, every each of them had also turned pale.

And the center of the whirlpool, *Yan Wang*, remained missing, it was unknown whether he was dead or alive.

The next day was the Grand Court Meeting*, but it had to be canceled temporarily close to its appointed time. Doctors rushed in and out of the palace like ants crawling on a hot pot. Gu Yun and Shen Yi stayed in the palace for a night, then left in the early autumn morning dew.

**It was a kind of ritual with the highest standards that began in the Western Zhou Dynasty. All officials meet the Son of Heaven.*

The scent of medicine of the deep palace still seemed to linger on the tip of Gu Yun's nose, his nose was particularly sharp, he was happy to appreciate a variety of flavors, the fragrance of makeup on beautiful ladies, the summer wind in the rich fragrance of herbs, the fresh and peaceful herbal scent on a beautiful young man...the only scent he did not like was from medicine.

Especially when the doors and windows were closed, the stifling smell of medicine in the room remains dull and lingering, like a mire which can drag living people inside.

After this battle, the two men walked side by side, their hearts and minds exhausted, no one said a word. All the way out until they were out of the palace, Shen Yi did not feel reassured, he finally asked: "How are your eyes?"

Gu Yun shook his head.

Shen Yi did not know whether he shook his head to say *'nothing's wrong'* or *'not so good'*. After thinking about it, he felt that Gu Yun's house had no one to take care of him, he ordered the driver to go in the direction of his home.

The capital's martial law had not been lifted. There were no people on either side of the bluestone slab. When the curtain was lifted, only the sound of the carriage's wheels could be heard. Shen Yi sighed tiredly and supported the slightly shaking steam lamp overhead. The lamp cast a large shadow on Gu Yun's face. There was a blue hue under his eyes, his cheeks were hollow. When he got into the carriage, he immediately crossed his arms on his chest and leaned aside, closing his eyes to rest. He did not even bother to ask where Shen Yi was dragging him to.

Only when the carriage arrived at his home did Shen Yi wake him up. In such a short time, Gu Yun actually managed to fall asleep. He was slightly dazed when he opened his eyes, being blown by a little morning breeze before he came to consciousness. He squinted at the door of Shen manor and said, "Just now, in a hurry, I seem to have heard someone say that Master Shen is ill?"

Shen Yi gave a dry cough, it was not convenient to speak honestly at the gate. He had to wink and smile at him.

Gu Yun understood him: "I visit the bedridden empty-handed like this..."

Shen Yi grinned bitterly and said, "Oh no, It's all right. You brought his son back home with all his arms and legs intact, it's already the biggest gift... You shut up for me!"

The latter sentence was towards the unfathomable god bird in front of Shen's gate.

Today, the gate guardian bird seemed to be in a good mood. It didn't intend to show its might, only staring at Gu Yun curiously with its neck outstretched. Who knew that just after a little flutter of his wings, it was scolded by Shen Yi, immediately angered, its guts also grew larger, whining loudly to greet the guest, "Animals! Little beast! With a gloomy face, die today and get buried tomorrow!

Shen Yi: "..."

This ancestor of their family only recognized Master Shen. When it saw him, it congratulated him on making a fortune, its attitude towards other two-legged animals was always 'Bring it on, animals'.

Gu Yun's face did not change. It seemed that it was not the first time he was scolded by this bird. His fingers were put together, giving the bird a flick, the strong wind hitting the bird's beak, it was knocked over by this 'slap', feathers falling all over. It immediately shrunk back from fearing the strong. After a moment of silence, it spoke out in a small voice, "Gentleman bearing great fortune and blessing, name is written on the golden list."

General Shen was about to lose his composure.

Gu Yun smiled and turned to walk into the courtyard. Unexpectedly, as he did so, the bird immediately turned its face like turning a page of a book and said viciously, "Bah! Bah!"

According to reason, an adult of more or less than a hundred pounds should not have argued with a flat-haired animal weighing less than one pound. Unfortunately, the Marquis of Order was not reasonable. When he heard this sound, he immediately retreated two steps, took off the cage on the door and opened the cage, he took out the gate god and said to Shen Yi, "Tell your old man, I will take this one with me. I'll buy him a new one another day."

Shen Yi had already had enough of it for a very long time, his tears were falling from gratitude, "Of course, no problem, words cannot express my thanks!"

The 'gate god' was so frightened that its feathers all stood up as it screamed, "Help! Someone wanted to murder the husband - ga!"

...Its neck was pinched by Gu Yun.

The noise awakened the sleeping servant inside, who rubbed his eyes. Upon seeing that Gu Yun came, he busily greeted the guest and led the way inside.

Entering the inner courtyard, Shen Yi swept around. Seeing no one near and far, he lowered his voice and asked, "Where is His Highness *Yan Wang* right now?"

Gu Yun shook his head slowly.

Shen Yi was surprised: "You don't know either?"

"We already lost communication in Yangzhou." Gu Yun took the bird in one hand and pinched his eyebrow with the other, soon turning it red. He first gave Shen Yi a brief summary of his journey then said, "He asked Xiao Cao to pretend to be him and mix in with Yang Rong Gui, while he himself acted in the dark. I heard from one of the guards I left for him said that it seemed he had entered a group in the pugilist world to look for a refugee to serve as a witness. On the way, he only sent a short note saying *'Doing alright, don't miss me'*, telling us to go back to the capital without having to worry about him. After that, he never contacted us again. Yang Rong Gui used his name to rebel, I had no choice but to come back here to help him lighten this situation a bit. I left a few people on that side, I also asked General Zhong to send someone to secretly investigate, but even now..."

After half a day of trouble, there was still suspense on that side.

Shen Yi did not know what to say for a moment. He stretched out his hand and pressed Gu Yun's shoulder. "Don't you know the ability of *Yan Wang*? You see, he didn't show his face but understands the proper limit in his heart, you know it will be okay. Besides, he has been following Old Zhong since he was a child, wandering all over the world. There is nothing that he hasn't seen before. It's all right."

Gu Yun's eyebrows twisted together without any intention to relax them.

Shen Yi could only change the subject, "How is the Emperor?"

Gu Yun sighed: "He's unhurt. The doctor said he only collapsed from excessive anger and needs to rest. But to be honest, I'm already fed up from hearing the word 'rest'. Doctors seem to always spit this out to deal with all patients. If people can truly take a rest, then who wouldn't?"

Shen Yi asked carefully, "Didn't he say anything when he summoned you?"

Gu Yun was silent for a moment. "He did, he asked me, '*If the rainstorm pours, the river tide rises, then can a jiao grows horns*?"

Shen Yi held his breath at once. A jiao growing horns was the appearance of its transformation into a dragon. It was very clear who this sentence implied: "You..."

Gu Yun said: "I answered: Jiao or dragon, both are originally close relatives in folklore, calls for rain and moistens the earth, they are of the same kind. But even if it is a divine jiao, for the sake of becoming a dragon, letting the tide rise and abandon both sides of the river, then is it not causing disasters? It must also be an evil jiao with a long history of sins, bringing misfortune to the people."

Shen Yi: "... That's what you said to the Emperor?

Gu Yun: "Mm."

In fact, Li Feng also told him something else.

When the man who was still in his prime leaned on the bed, he suddenly gave off the aura of a sun about to set. Li Feng asked without warning, "What did the former emperor say to you before his passing?"

The former emperor had said a lot, in fact, all of them were still vivid in Gu Yun's memory even now. Listening to Li Feng's question, he pondered a little and picked out the safest sentence as his answer, "The emperor told me, '*Everything good will turn bad when there is too much, we must learn to cherish our good fortune and know how to advance and retreat properly*'."

Li Feng was somewhat stunned, he turned his head to watch the light of dawn before it came to life, repeating the words '*Every good thing will turn bad*' several times, then completely changed the subject: "...A Min had told me about his childhood abuse by the barbarian woman. Does Uncle know of this?"

Even if Gu Yun used all his focus, he was still momentarily confused, not understanding what Li Feng meant.

At that time, just outside the window, a bird accidentally trampled the tree branch. Frightened, it fluttered its wings and flew to the sky. Li Feng was awakened by the movement. The blank but tired expression on his face suddenly dispersed. He looked back at Gu Yun, there seemed to be a lot of words contained in his eyes, but at last, he did not say anything waving his hand to dismiss him.

Shen Yi sighed, "The monarch's heart is hard to measure, the people's heart is hard to measure."

Gu Yun came back to his senses and said, "Tired."

"Isn't it," Shen Yi said sympathetically. "There are people who were completely lawless, fishing in troubled waters... It was much better to fight at the frontier gates — in fact, the period of time when I was a mechanic in Ling Shu Institute, it was truly the most worry-free. Zi Xi, sometimes I think that the capital is just like the Cave of Silken Web*. There are dangers everywhere.

How about we both abandon all of this heavy burden and find a place to open a small shop, do some small business together. We can't die of hunger, and we don't have to assess anyone's face either. Selling something... um, We can sell tools and oils for mechanics. What do you say?"

**from Journey to the West, a lair of seductive spider spirits*

"Are you crazy?" Gu Yun gave him a despicable glare. "Making yourself oily all day and serving a bunch of equally oily and smelly customers — I won't do it. If we're selling something, I want to sell makeup, it's better to see beautiful people coming and going everyday."

When Shen Yi heard this, his proper heart overflowed once again, he laughed and teased, "Does His Highness *Yan Wang* know you have such a big ambition?"

Gu Yun laughed along, but only for a moment, and soon he could no longer laugh. In front of Shen Yi, he did not waste his efforts to conceal himself, showing his sadness and worry.

Where was Chang Geng now?

Even if he could come back without any danger, what are they supposed to say to Li Feng? After this battle, could the two brothers still continue on as if nothing was wrong?

Shen Yi quietly looked on. When he saw that as the topic returned to *Yan Wang*, Gu Yun couldn't even put on a false pretense. He had never seen Gu Yun care for someone so deeply. For a moment, he was somewhat shocked and dared not go on.

In recent years, the situation of the world had been very chaotic, some parts of the civilians were very unrestrained, effectively imitating foreigners to put aside all boundaries between men and women. At the same time, some great Confucian families have become more and more rigid in sticking to the old system, shouting for the collapse of etiquette, and tightening the confinement of their children and family gates.

But somehow, Shen Yi always felt that the world was somewhat ruthless — for the former type, it was in love for three days, broken off after two days, putting aside the matchmaker's agreement of parents. In fact, when it comes to marriage affairs, everyone harbored somewhat of a calculation in their hearts. Even if others do not interfere, they themselves would measure the matter of pros and cons, and eventually, they would still pinch their noses and live with spouses.

The latter type, there was no need to mention, go along with the old rites when they come of age. Two people knowing nothing about one another were forced to live together, it was not much different from breeding horses.

Perfect conjugal bliss perfect as a jade, it all depends on luck resembling a blind cat catching a mouse. There was only so little affection in the world. Madmen take some, the fools take some, with so little left, how could it be enough to divide?

To be like *Yan Wang* and Gu Yun, it was truly rare.

Although neither of them showed much in front of outsiders, with Shen Yi's understanding of Gu Yun, if it truly wasn't because he could not let go, Gu Yun would never have stepped over the line of his adoptive father and son relationship.

Shen Yi couldn't help feeling frightened when he thought about it. His old hen habit acted up again. He asked in a low voice, "Zi Xi, don't say that I have a crow mouth, but have you ever thought about it, in case there is any problem between the two of you in the future, how do you intend to end it?"

Gu Yun did not say anything for a long time, but this time, he finally did not give an empty reply. When they were about to arrive at the backyard, Gu Yun suddenly whispered: "I have thought about it, I do not know."

Shen Yi was speechless for a moment.

Even if it was a vow or oath, it was not as shocking as these words in his ears.

When they entered the backyard, they saw that the old Master Shen who was rumored to be bedridden was practicing martial arts with overflowing energy, with no intention of dying at all. Gu Yun's visit made the old man very happy, he pulled him over to talk about his health-preserving experience. He also kindly invited Marshal Gu to play hand pushing with him.

Fearing that his father who bit off more than he can chew would be pushed all the way to the coffin by General Gu, Shen Yi stopped the invitation with a cold sweat and took Gu Yun to rest.

Gu Yun fell asleep up until the afternoon. Before he could wake up completely, he was dragged up by Shen Yi who barged in. "The

Emperor urgently ordered you to enter the palace."

Gu Yun rushed to the palace and was first shocked by the sight of the guard who had been assigned to Chang Geng by himself. The guard clearly appeared to have gone through a long journey, he was in a very bad state, with wounds and bloodstains on his body. Gu Yun's heartbeat sharply quickened. He moistened his lips with difficulty, reluctantly restrained his emotions and quickly paid respect to Li Feng.

"Uncle will be relieved of courtesy," Li Feng, a haggard-faced man, dragged his sick body up and turned to the guard, "What is *Yan Wang*'s situation?"

The guard bowed his head and said to Li Feng, "Under the Marshal's command, your subordinate accompanied and protected His Royal Highness and Master Xu to investigate the epidemic in Jiangbei. Yang Rong Gui harbored an ulterior motive, we had to travel to Jiangbei Camp to report this, losing communication with *Yan Wang* for a while. Later, Yang Rong Gui went north, Marshal was unsure whether *Yan Wang* was being held captive by him or whether he had found a way to escape. On one hand, he took people back to the capital, on the other, he left me and the others in Yangzhou Prefecture to try to find a trace of *Yan Wang*..."

These were the words that Gu Yun had instructed them in advance. In fact, when Chang Geng entered Sha Hai group, the guards had stayed behind in Yangzhou.

Later, when Gu Yun departed to the capital city, still not feeling reassured about Chang Geng, he had left them in Yangzhou and let them continue to search for Chang Geng's whereabouts.

Gu Yun frowned and suddenly felt an ominous premonition.

"The person in Yang Rong Gui's hands is fake," Li Feng interrupted. "Does it mean that you already found traces of A Min?"

The guard took a letter from his bosom: "Your Majesty please take a look."

The letter was written in Chang Geng's handwriting, it was slightly messy compared with his usual neatness, even stained with blood.

Gu Yun's fingertips slightly trembled. Suddenly, he came to understand Chang Geng's 'fear of blood' when he came to dress his wounds when he was defending the capital city.

Li Feng took over and read it, his brows becoming tighter and tighter. After a while, he sighed and said nothing, handing the letter to Gu Yun.

Gu Yun probably exhausted all his efforts to make himself not appearing too anxious and impatient.

At the beginning of the letter, it was fairly normal, basically nonsensical words. It described how he managed to escape from Yang Rong Gui. Later, they fell into the hands of the Sha Hai Group by mistake and found that some of the refugees in Jiangbei were secretly imprisoned and persecuted by Yang Rong Gui, some other joined the gang of bandits. *Yan Wang* decided to seek testimony from one of the refugees. With Master Xu, they sneaked into the bandits' den to investigate the matter. Xu Ling has probably been coaxed by Chang Geng to carry out any of his order.

The latter part was unusual——

Chang Geng wrote a few sentences about what he had seen and heard in Sha Hai Group. Yang Rong Gui's lawless deeds made one felt horrified the more they listen. However, just when he managed to convince a group of bandits from Sha Hai Group to follow him into the capital, some internal problems broke out in the group.

Despite receiving a lot of refugees, the bandits were bandits after all. They were naturally hostile towards government officials. Some bandits suspect that the *Yan Wang*'s entry into the Sha Hai Group did not have good intentions, that he only wished to persuade them to surrender, there were more and more fierce debates on three or two occasions and even conflicts among various forces within the group.

There were also many who love to stir up separation. Local

people already had many complaints and grievances, it quickly led to trouble that triggered a mob rebellion.

In his letter, Chang Geng warned that although the mob seemed to have great momentum, its firepower and steel armors were limited, and it was not likely to be able to stand a chance against the army of Jiangbei Camp. The situation would inevitably expand, the people's grievances and hatred would deepen, suppression by force was the worst strategy, thus he would try to not let Jiangbei Camp intervene. He said that he would take care of it thoroughly from the inside, stabilize the people's hearts and calm their grievances.

When Gu Yun saw this, his head was overflowing with the urge to kill someone. Wasn't this fucking nonsense?

This could also be called 'doing alright'?!

The guard opened his mouth and said, "Marshal, His Highness made his order, your subordinates dared not disobey it, but the situation is getting worse and worse. After Yang Rong Gui left, his city defense officers and soldiers resembled a snake losing its head, being beaten left and right. Some of the rebel had relatives and friends died in Yang Rong Gui's hands, hated the local government, they used cruel means and often tortured the captured officers and soldiers to death, seeing that it will be difficult to clean up, General Zhong ordered me to report this to the court as soon as possible, seeking imperial orders."

Li Feng asked, "Then where is A Min?"

The guard knelt down: "...Your Majesty, His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*... After His Highness managed to send this letter through by many different hands, there is no other information about him. At that time, it was a monk who secretly delivered this letter. The temple where the monk lived was burnt down the next day."

Gu Yun almost could not breathe.

Li Feng was also stunned by this consecutive unexpected changes.

Chapter 96: Danger

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"Zi Xi, it hurts..."

—

When Chang Geng opened his eyes, his surroundings were dark, the only surface reflecting the light nearby was Master Liao Ran's bald head.

As soon as he moved, Xu Ling, who was in a very bad state, rushed over and shouted, "Your Highness! Your Highness! You are awake! Do you still recognize me? Your Highness…"

Before he finished shouting, Master Xu had began to choke. He resembled Chang Geng's filial son, looking at him and wiping his tears. Unexpectedly, the more he wiped, the more tears began to pour, in the end, he sat aside and began to weep loudly.

Chang Geng: "..."

This ear-piercing sound had a very similar effect to the flute of his General Gu, buzzing around Chang Geng's ear. At this moment, he was very glad that Master Liao Ran was a mute man.

The mute not only won't squeal, but also very considerately comforted Master Xu, who had a runny nose and tears all over.

He approached Chang Geng and said through sign language, "This place is close to Jiangbei Camp, it's very safe. The wooden bird had been released. The little brother under Brother Sun has also tried to find a way to contact Jiangbei Camp using Your Highness's token. If there is no accident, General Zhong will be able to find this place soon, Your Highness rest assured."

Although the monk often pretended to be mysterious and did not like to bathe, he was worthy of being high-ranking disciple in Lin Yuan Pavilion. In more than 360 days of the year, there were always two days where he could be depended on.

Chang Geng nodded his head tiredly and deeply understood what was called ‘having one's boat overturned in a pond’, he could not help laughing bitterly.

On that day, Chang Geng left the guards behind and took Xu Ling to Sha Hai group alone. Unfortunately, with not much luck, his arrival was very untimely.

They had just followed Boss Sun to the sub-branch of the group. On the way to the main headquarters, the mob of rebels had already come out of their nests, just in time to run into them.

In fact, at this time, although Chang Geng's heart did startle, he was not so nervous.

According to his understanding of Jiangbei’s situation at this time, the rebellion did not come as a surprise to him. Dogs jump against the wall, rabbits bite people when scared. Everyone knew that rebellion was a major crime punishable by execution by nine generations, but even if nine generations were all dead, they themselves struggled to get by, how could this be the way to live? To die as a coward or to die as a beheaded rebel were still death either way. A person could not die twice, then it would be better to rise up, at least they could die for a meaningful purpose, leaving their names behind in history books.

The refugees who escaped from Jiangbei have had their hands forced into rebelling.

However, Chang Geng was not a god. He could deduce that there might be such a phenomenon among the refugees, but it was impossible to know when and what way they were going to rebel. But at that time, Chang Geng only felt that he had come at the wrong time — what storms had *Yan Wang* never experienced? He had never thought that the situation will get out of his control.

Chang Geng knew that this kind of mob rebellion was not difficult to resolve.

First of all, both the court and the rebels all knew that in the era of fighting by *Ziliujin*, one could not achieve victory by having two or

three martial arts masters, machines and armors were of the utmost importance, even the best and most famous general like Gu Yun would not be able to do much when the ammunition was exhausted. The Sha Hai Group, even if this gang from the pugilist world was any bigger, was by no means an opponent of Jiangbei Camp as long as it did not have firearms, steel armor. and its own source of *Ziliujin*.

They had no choice but to rebel. Their reason was not outside of seeking for a way to survive from the court.

Before Chang Geng came, he had prepared this road to survival for them. People who were brave and fearless of death would still hold onto a chance to survive. If they could, who would be willing to clash against Jiangbei Camp? Who would want to be an egg going against a rock?

Although Boss Sun, the one who took Chang Geng to the Sha Hai Group, spoke harshly and had a bad attitude, he was a smart man and did not act recklessly. Looking at the conflict inside the group, he immediately concealed Chang Geng and Xu Ling's identity. In this situation where everyone was on edge, with a Yan Wang that had fallen from the sky, not only was it unable to stabilize the people, but it would ignite the fire in the rebel army. If there truly was a short-sighted fool who would detain Yan Wang to threaten Jiangbei Camp, then the two sides will truly end badly.

Boss Sun himself and Chang Geng coincidentally had the same idea. They did not want to use the lives of these pitiful people to fill the muzzle of Jiangbei Camp which should be aimed at the foreigners — just to make the court hear a hoarse and exhaustive cry.

Hence, Chang Geng and Xu Ling continued pretending to be volunteer merchants from the south, Boss Sun helped to hide them. At the same time, Liao Ran, who had been mixing with refugees in Jiangbei to pray for the people also happened to be in Sha Hai Group. Thanks to the relationships Liao Ran established beforehand, they were able to smoothly contact the top ranking leaders of the rebel army.

As everyone knew, *Yan Wang* had a persistent three-inch tongue that could adapt to whoever he spoke with. Except for always acting

out of order when facing Gu Yun, this ability had excellent fighting power at other times. As long as he was willing to, he could fool anyone. In a short period of more than a month, Chang Geng had basically controlled the situation. Originally, the people in the group were overheated, later on, everyone was willing to sit down and weigh the advantages and disadvantages.

Except for one stubborn thorn who did not want to breathe the same air as the imperial court, the ‘four kings’ of Sha Hai group, including Boss Sun, were all persuaded by Chang Geng, willing to send people to try to contact the court first.

But at this time, Jiangbei Camp, which had been searching for *Yan Wang*'s whereabouts in silence, suddenly made movements. The atmosphere suddenly became tense once again.

Chang Geng knew that the false *Yan Wang* had arrived in the capital, the deed had been revealed and his disappearance in Yangzhou had become a well-known matter. Involving a prince, Jiangbei Camp was forced to change its attitude from acting secretly to publicly.

On one hand, Chang Geng reassured the rebels of Sha Hai Group. On the other hand, he personally wrote a paper, hoping that Jiangbei Camp would not act rashly for the time being, to avoid bringing all his efforts so far to ruin.

Who knew that something would go wrong at this time.

When struck with bad luck, one could choke even while drinking water. *Yan Wang* had never had things go his way since entering the bandit's den. After the Sha Hai Group conspired to rebel, they implemented the strategy of ‘cunning rabbits have three caves’ for safety and changed the location of their headquarters once in ten days.

At this time, the headquarters had just been moved to a small hill in Jiangbei, leaning on a mine — Jiangbei did not lack mines like this. If Chang Geng had an expert Mechanic beside him right now, they would remind him of these small mines, for the wooden birds might not be able to fly out in places near the mountain.

Some mines would invalidate compass and other objects. Even though Lin Yuan’s wooden bird was exquisitely made, its core mechanics relied on a special magnet in the abdomen, which could establish a connection with the magnet carried by individuals of Lin Yuan Pavilion. Wooden birds could only fly in the air through height to bypass the interference. When they were not, circling around the mines, the magnets in the abdomen of all wooden birds would be ruined immediately.

The bird could not fly out. With no other way, Chang Geng had to use a clumsy method — let Liao Ran himself run to send the message, it was the letter Gu Yun's personal guard brought to the capital.

As a result, something went wrong.

The four rebel leaders generally did not have good education. Their level of hobby was very close to old peasants who listened to plays in the temple, referring to themselves as ‘King of Heaven’, ‘King of Earth’ and ‘King of Man’, evoking goosebumps.

Boss Sun was the ‘King of Man’, the ‘King of Heaven’ was the especially stubborn thorn who was extremely vicious and harbored deep hatred towards the court.

The stubborn man originally had great influence. Everyone once wanted to follow him in rebellion, but now suddenly turned from a big boss to a hard-head minority. After careful consideration, he felt that everything in this started from the ‘King of Man’, who was always unwilling to confront Jiangbei Camp. Holding a grudge against Boss Sun who was ‘greedy for life and afraid of death’, he bribed a trusted underling of Boss Sun, ready to catch him by his weak point and eliminate him.

The result was quite coincidental. The man who had been bribed spied for six to seven days, not being able to catch Boss Sun's weak point, but managed to see Liao Ran leaving the headquarters late at night, making contact with people from the court.

When the King of Heaven saw that the man who they had called brother for so long was a hound for the court, he turned furious at

once, his little trust on the man collapsed in an instant.

Chang Geng made a quick decision, taking the lead in inviting all the leading and respectable bandits to come, admitted his imperial envoy status before the King of Heaven could come to his door questioning. Although the timing was not very mature, it was better than being exposed by another.

Chang Geng could certainly kill the King of Heaven, but the people of the pugilist world have their own way of life. These people who made a living by lowly means were not as practical as the court's officials. Failure to deal with them might trigger a rebound.

At first, the bandit's nest was blown up by the King of Heaven's intentional provocation, a dozen mouths noisily argued. *Yan Wang* then boldly took out a knife for chopping wood and nailed it on the table, saying coldly, "Then let us follow the rules, three knives and six holes*."

** a rule among bandits, when someone does an irreparable mistake and is asking for forgiveness, you must be stabbed thoroughly three times*

This move was able to suppress most people, but could not fool the true bandit. The King of Heaven's ferocious blood was aroused by him. Without saying another word, he stabbed Chang Geng with the knife. Chang Geng knew that this ordeal would not be able to end if he did not take this stab, thus he stood without hiding.

The rebels were stunned. As soon as they saw blood, especially the big leaders, they knew that *Yan Wang* could not die in Sha Hai group in this shady way. Otherwise, at that point, they would be forced to rebel without wanting to, there would be no other way but to die, all hope for turning back will all but vanish. Therefore, they hurriedly tried to make peace and stopped one another. The King of Heaven turned even angrier, announcing on the spot that he would take his men to separate from Sha Hai Group.

With internal fighting in the group, the matter of rebellion had to be put aside. Boss Sun sent people to escort Chang Geng to leave during the night. On the way, they were intercepted by several waves of the King of Heaven's men coming for their lives, almost all the

underlings left to him by Boss Sun were lost.

However, the type that would lock himself in a Heavy Armor like Master Liao Ran was half a burden, while Xu Ling was entirely a burden. For a martial arts master, even if he was alone in a Tiger Cave, it was still more comfortable than running for their lives with a few burdens.

Chang Geng was injured. He had not struggled this much for many years. In order to protect Master Xu, his critical chest area took another knife wound that overturned his skin and flesh. Fortunately, he was still half Miss Chen's apprentice, for better or worse, he could still somehow stop the blood.

Liao Ran used a leaf to gather water and fed it to Chang Geng, then found the medicine he had with him to rewrap the wounds. Chang Geng drank the water, letting out a sigh and gathered some strength to speak, he tried to regain his spirit and patted the side, joking to Xu Ling, "Come, sit here, Ming Yu. To lose one's horse might be a blessing, Before my breath runs out, you first stop your mourning."

Xu Ling wiped his tears with his sleeve, after repeating the words ‘how embarrassing’ several times, he choked up again, "It was this lowly official who had dragged Your Highness down."

Chang Geng laughed softly when he heard these words: "Last time when foreigners besieged the city, Brother Ming Yu himself determined to work hard and learn a foreign language. What do you intend to do after this? Do you want to go back and learn martial arts that could break big stones with your chest?"

Xu Ling: "..."

Chang Geng: "You see, Master Liao Ran doesn't cry, he is very calm."

The monk shamelessly gestured, "The poor monk was not able to be of use and had to rely on the protection of Your Highness. I will surely light a longevity lamp for Your Highness and chant sutras every day for you after returning."

"Thank you, Master, but with your dignified image, if you were to open your mouth, I am afraid I would have to die young."

Chang Geng adjusted his posture with difficulty. A cold sweat immediately trickled down from behind his ear. He gasped for breath and said to Xu Ling, "These days, that boiling...matter, the bandits of Sha Hai Group had also begun to talk about it. Yang Rong Gui used my name to rebel. Even if we were innocent, they certainly can not catch our weak point, but...logic could say otherwise... Ah... Master, you can't talk, but are you also blind?"

Liao Ran, who had little eyesight, together with Xu Ling, came closer to support Chang Geng left and right, carefully avoided his wounds and turned him over.

"Mm, logic says otherwise… we would not be able to clear ourselves." Chang Geng then withstood the pain to fill in the latter part of the sentence, "The situation of the refugees in Jiangbei have arrived at this stage, we cannot give up halfway... Instead of rushing back to find the Emperor to defend ourselves, I'd better stay here to settle the matter thoroughly, then I can take advantage of this minor skin and flesh injury to take a leave and avoid suspicion."

Xu Ling saw his newly wrapped gauze starting to bleed again, hearing the careless phrase ‘minor skin and flesh injuries’, his admiration for *Yan Wang* was beyond reproach. It was not much less compared to Master Feng Han from the capital.

He was about to express his feelings sincerely, when suddenly the monk's face changed. He waved his hand to stop Master Xu and tilted his head to place his ear to the ground. A moment later, he gestured to Chang Geng, "There are no less than dozens of people coming, strong steeds, which side could they belong to?"

No one could tell whether the people coming was General Zhong's or the mad dogs of the King of Heaven.

Chang Geng pressed Xu Ling's shoulder with one hand and barely propped himself up. Xu Ling was surprised. He was about to open his mouth to stop him when Chang Geng reached out and interrupted: "Shh-"

The relaxed look he deliberately displayed on his face just now vanished, his eyes shone brightly, his focus concentrated, like a wounded king of beasts. Even if he was bleeding all over, he could still bare his fangs and deliver a deadly blow.

Chang Geng held a knife he had stolen from an unknown bandit. The pale back of his hand was covered with blue veins, yet he did not appear weak from grave injuries. On the contrary, it only made people feel horrified.

Xu Ling could not help holding his breath.

Suddenly, Chang Geng slightly tilted his head, his cracked and dry lips then showed a slight smile. He stretched out his hand to straighten his messy clothes, threw down his knife and said to Xu Ling firmly, "Go see which general is coming, go welcome them, say that I invited them in."

Xu Ling was dumbfounded: "Your Highness, how do you know..."

"How can those people in the Sha Hai Group have such orderly horse hooves and footsteps? It must be one of the generals of Jiangbei Camp." Chang Geng took time to cover up the horrifying wounds on his chest and abdomen with his torn up otter robe. He said gracefully, "Pardon this Prince for being slightly under the weather, how rude of me."

Liao Ran: "..."

Yan Wang's skill of pretending could be said to have been passed down by Marshal Gu.

Xu Ling threw himself into the ground with respect for him. At this time, even if *Yan Wang* farted, he would unconditionally believe in it. He immediately went out to welcome them.

Chang Geng reached for his pouch and felt around. There were some emergency medicines in it besides the tranquilizer. He took out a piece of numbing leaf with trembling fingers and clasped it in his hand secretly. He planned to chew a piece for emergency later on if the pain was too much to bear. He then refused the aid of Liao Ran

and supported himself with the knife to stand up.

Just then, he heard Xu Ling shout, "Your Highness, it is..."

Without saying anything, the visitor had already strode in in the midst of sharp horse neighing.

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun, who was supposed to have returned to the capital, came in against the light.

Chang Geng was no longer able to stand on his feet. The knife made a loud noise as it was dropped to the ground. He threw himself forward and was caught by Gu Yun.

The Yan Wang who was still ‘walking leisurely in a bloody rain’ suddenly ‘collapsed from pain’, the calm and complacent ‘King of Beasts’ became a frail sick cat, a hand weakly dropped down from Gu Yun's shoulder. He breathed a silky whisper: "Zi Xi, it hurts..."

Chapter 97: Dust Settled

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If that was the case, the last words you would have said to me would be 'get out', I'm not willing to close my eyes even in death.

—

After Chang Geng said this sentence, as if spitting out all his pain, his whole body was empty, almost fainting directly. The moment he saw Gu Yun, his rigid backbone softened and was pulled out, there was not a trace of strength left.

Nevertheless, he still could not find the heart to shut his eyes, resting on Gu Yun's shoulder and tried to recover for a moment. He seized Gu Yun's clothing consciously or unconsciously.

Losing too much blood, Chang Geng's body felt cold all over. Only Gu Yun's temperature and the familiar bitter scent of medicine reminded him in a trance how Gu Yu wrapped him in his cloak in the ice and snow and took him inside when he was a child. For a moment, he lost his sense of time and murmured, "...do you have any wine?"

Xu Ling eagerly came over and tried to give them a hand: "Marshal, let me help..."

... Unfortunately, Master Liao Ran, who heard the whole scene from start to finish, held him back.

The monk who stood beyond the mortal world heard a few of Yan Wang's delirious mumbles, instantly shocked by the hidden meaning inside.

Gu Yun did not utter a word. He safely picked Chang Geng up and carried him to the carriage. He frowned deeply and ordered, "Call a military doctor!"

After that, he took out a kettle - when on a march or expedition, the kettle did not carry pure water inside, but a little bit of salt would be mixed in. This trick was first learned from the merchants traveling in

the desert.

Gu Yun let Chang Geng lay on himself, telling a blatant lie, "Here comes the wine, open your mouth."

Chang Geng was only in a little dazed, not completely confused. If it wasn't Gu Yun who came, he could kill another group of fierce rebels. He drank a few mouthfuls in cooperation, then chuckled and said, "You tricked me."

Gu Yun not only deceived him, but he also wanted to hang him up and give him a beating, so that he could understand the meaning of the sentence, 'a being of precious status should sit and stand properly'. But when he saw the real person in the flesh, his heart ached so much that his chest turned numb. How could he be angry?

No matter how Yan Wang overturned the river and the sea outside, he had never been injured like this right under his eyes. Gu Yun sat stiff for a moment expressionlessly, then carefully pushed the front of his clothes and took a look. A heavy scent of blood immediately rushed to his face. Gu Yun's chest fluctuated violently. For the first time in his life, he knew what it was like to have trembling hands.

Chang Geng seemed to be able to feel his emotional turmoil. For a moment, he tasted the sweetness of acting spoiled and refused to stop. He poured oil into the fire and whispered in Gu Yun's ear, "I was afraid I can never see you again..."

Gu Yun closed his eyes slightly, his face tensed, his hands were very gentle, all anger was concentrated on the tip of his tongue. He said coldly, "Pardon my poor eyesight, I cannot see what is there to be afraid of, considering Your Highness's careful calculation'."

Chang Geng did not seem to hear him. Using the curtain as cover, he rubbed his face gently between Gu Yun's shoulder and neck. His voice was somewhat vague as whispered, "If that was the case, the last words you would have said to me would be 'get out', I'm not willing to close my eyes even in death."

Gu Yun: "..."

He felt that the man in his arms was like an abominable vine, stretching out loads of deadly twig and poking endlessly into his heart.

Outside came the sound of horses hooves far and near. A man shouted in a loud voice of a messenger, "Marshal, the military doctor had arrived!"

Chang Geng seemed to be in extreme pain, but dared not let it show. He maintained his original posture and took in a soft breath slowly, revealing his pale neck. Gu Yun was both angry and distressed, he lowered his head and kissed him furiously under the cover of the curtain. His lips were gentle as dragonflies on the water surface, but his expression was like seeking revenge.

Chang Geng suddenly opened his eyes, his scattered sight suddenly regained focus, looking at Gu Yun with expectation.

Gu Yun said in his ear, "I'll settle this matter with you later after we're home."

After that, he flung up the curtain and shouted towards the military doctor running over, "Hurry up!"

The military doctor originally wanted to clear away any uninvolved people, but was already frightened upon meeting Gu Yun's eyes. He dared not send Marshal Gu away even if his guts were bigger, he had to endure Gu Yun's gaze that could make one sweat and treat the two horrifying wounds on Yan Wang's body with trepidation.

When there are outsiders, Chang Geng refused to say anything. Only when the clumsy military doctor pulled his wound while pulling the gauze did he endure with a slight twitch. Gu Yun's expression turned worse as time goes by, suddenly, Chang Geng placed a cold hand on his using the cover of his wide sleeve. Chang Geng seemed to know that he was upset and did not dare to hold it, only making light contact, sneaking glances at him several times.

Gu Yun looked down at him and saw a drop of cold sweat rolling down his forehead to his eyes, sticking to his eyelashes and rolling down with a blink. The gaze that came out of the cold sweat and

appeared cloudy.

Gu Yun: "..."

When Chang Geng was a child, he was already very good at acting spoiled, but now he was no longer of ordinary level, it almost reached a godlike state. Gu Yun could not help it, being stared at by these eyes for an incense time, he truly had to give him anything he wanted, accepting his fate, he took Chang Geng's hand and pulled him to his chest, whispering, "Close your eyes."

Chang Geng shut his eyes without another word. During this trip, he had thoroughly cleaned up the chaos in Jiangbei, this big stone had fallen on the ground. At this time, his heart was almost free of concern. Listening to Gu Yun's heartbeat, he felt that even if he died on this occasion, there would be no regrets, he fell asleep peacefully.

The Sha Hai Group could no longer stir up a storm with its internal conflicts. General Zhong honourably abided by the promise given by Yan Wang, not moving a single soldier. He sincerely wrote a letter of peace and sent it to them. The remnants of the King of Heaven's people were cleaned up by Chang Geng. The rest were dealt with by the joint effort of the other three bandits leaders, the rebellion that should have shed blood into a river disappeared into thin air.

Three days later, Yao Zhen came from Jiangbei Camp to serve as governor of Liangjiang for the time being. Yao Zhen first captured Yang Rong Gui's party, then led people to find where Yang Rong Gui had detained the refugees, released them all one by one, comforted them and re-compiled their official documents, he then asked the ones responsible for registering lost relatives and friends to send people to look for them, personally coming to comfort and compensate the bereaved families of those who had unfortunately fallen victim to it.

A few days later, the medicine sent by the court arrived in large quantities. Li Feng ordered that part of the stolen money and bribe would be returned to the capital, the rest would be distributed to the victims for relief immediately, then report back to the Ministry of Household.

Xu Ling restored his imperial status and thoroughly investigated the Yang-Lu party. He brought into full play his upright, impersonal attitude, confiscating their possessions neatly.

But as Yang Rong Gui said, there was hardly any gold or silver in his home. All of them were exchanged into Feng Huo tickets. Xu Ling had no choice but to consult the bedridden Yan Wang.

Chang Geng explained, "I know how many Feng Huo tickets were issued and who took them away. The treasury was not supported by that Yang. You can find out which folk businessmen he associates with on a regular basis, he was mostly in collusion with officials and businessmen. If you can't read the account book clearly or distinguish between true and false, you don't have to worry about it. I've looked for a person to come and help you. He will arrive in these few days, it is Du Wan Quan's son. He grew up with an abacus when he was young, he has a good and credible personal relationship with me, he can be trusted."

Xu Ling eagerly nodded.

"Also," Chang Geng leaned on the bed and raised his gaze slightly. The eyes that appeared to have been carved by knives could not be erased, even with the coldness of serious injuries. "The court decree stipulated that the Feng Huo ticket was equivalent to gold and silver, which could be circulated among the people, and the price was stipulated. It could be used as relief money. What's the problem?"

Xu Ling whispered, "Your Highness, the second batch of Feng Huo tickets has just been issued. There are not too many people who bought them. Except for your men, most of the people who bought the tickets are large families with some family background. They do not lack money to use. They usually leave the ticket at home for supply. Few of them circulate on the market. They really don't know whether the merchants can accept it or not. This is..."

Chang Geng reached out and grabbed the edge of the bed and propped himself up. "I can't control whether the holder is willing to keep it at home or take out to use. But it's a felony for the merchant to refuse to accept the Feng Huo ticket. Tomorrow, count all the Feng Huo tickets in Yang Rong Gui's house, then use them to buy relief

food from large ration merchant. Let me see who dares to treat imperial decrees as waste paper -- ask for a few people from Jiangbei Camp to go with you, do you understand?"

Understood, forcibly using this hoodlum trick, starting from Jiangbei, to deter the whole territory, forced people to recognize that 'Feng Huo ticket' was equal to gold and silver.

Starting with the big merchants who were so-called "shoe-wearing people fearing the barefooted", nobody wanted to offend the court. They could either pinch their noses and accept it, holding onto it after business was done, or they must try their best to turn the Feng Huo ticket into real gold and silver, sparing no effort to push it.

"Give them another ignition," Chang Geng whispered in a weak voice. "Let Brother Chong Ze write a decree in the name of Governor Liangjiang. If businesses, big or small, unreasonably refuse to accept the 'Feng Huo ticket', everyone can report to the Yangzhou government, if it turned out to be true, they will be punished by sticks and rods, those who repeatedly offend will be sent directly to prison."

Xu Ling understood His Highness's method of 'coaxing when it should be, punishing when it should be'. He responded hurriedly and ran back to work. Before he reached the door, Chang Geng suddenly stopped him and said, "Ming Yu."

Xu Ling turned around.

Chang Geng's stern face faded, and in a twinkling of an eye it was the gentle and elegant Yan Wang: "It all depends on you."

Xu Ling asked in confusion, "What do you mean, Your Highness?"

Chang Geng said, "I'm afraid I have to delay some time on the way, I won't be able to accompany you back to the capital. At that time, I hope you can bring a request to the Emperor for me."

A while ago, the pace was pressing, he should also be temporarily retreating. Footsteps need to be evened out, it was just in time for him to take advantage of the injuries to let go of power.

Unfortunately, the honest Master Xu obviously failed to understand what he meant. He solemnly put his hands together and said, "It is precisely this reason, Your Highness is seriously injured, you should take more care of yourself. You must take a good rest and leave the errands to me. If I don't understand something, I will ask you again."

Chang Geng laughed, seeing that he did not understand, he simply did not explain either, waving his hand to let him go.

Xu Ling was walking outside when he met the Marquis of Order who came in from outside. He quickly stopped to greet him.

Gu Yun politely nodded at him and brushed past. Suddenly, Xu Ling was stunned, Gu Yun was holding a bunch of fresh osmanthus flowers in the hand he hid behind his back, blooming golden with sweet fragrance.

Xu Ling watched him bring the flowers and walked to Yan Wang. He rubbed his nose full of flower fragrance, thinking in astonishment, "Marshal Gu is too attentive to His Highness."

Gu Yun went into the room and hung the flower branch on Chang Geng's curtain. "The osmanthus had bloomed, I was afraid you would feel stifled after lying down for too long - you don't dislike this scent, do you?"

Chang Geng's eyes stuck to him and refused to be averted.

Gu Yun looked straight at him: "What are you looking at?"

Chang Geng stretched out his hand to pull him.

Gu Yun was afraid that it would affect his wounds. He bent down and held his hand back. "Didn't I tell you not to mess around?"

Chang Geng grabbed his clothes relentlessly and pulled him closer. "Zi Xi, my wound hurts."

"..." Gu Yun said emotionlessly, "Let go, I won't fall for this trick."

This time being injured, Yan Wang did not seem to want to reserve

any dignity anymore. As long as there were no outsiders around him, it was always, 'my wound hurts, kiss me'.

The more one went along with a bad habit, the bigger it grew, there was absolutely no mistake.

Gu Yun flicked Chang Geng's forehead then turned around to change his clothes.

Chang Geng watched him moving behind the folding screen, grabbed a small sweet-scented osmanthus flower and chewed it carefully in his mouth, then stood up with a wooden cane on one side. He could not straighten his waist for now, reaching the desk step by step, dipped his pen tips with the little residual ink, spread out the paper and began to write reports.

This work truly required stamina. Before long, his forehead broke out a layer of sweat. Suddenly, the pen was pulled away from behind him. As soon as Chang Geng turned around, he was dragged up and carried to bed with both arms.

Gu Yun frowned and scolded, "What is so important that you have to write now? Lie down and don't make a ruckus!"

Chang Geng explained without haste: "This time, the Lu family are all involved, and the Fang family has not been able to profit from this either. It is a good time to carry out the new policy. Although I am not on the stage, I have to get things ready in advance."

Gu Yun sat beside the bed: "Do you still think about Ziliujin's authorization? The Emperor will not agree."

"It is not about that," Chang Geng said. "It's not yet time - the land confiscated along the canal can be used for settling the refugees. The best land for fish and rice will be kept for cultivation, and factories will be built elsewhere. Master Du, his trading group and the court will each distribute half of the funding. The factories will not be owned by private businessmen. They will be run by the court and under the Grand Council. In addition to the six ministries, a special department will be set up to supply Ziliujin, strictly controlling the source. On regular days, business affairs in factories will be handled

by trading groups. Sixty percent of the profits obtained will be directly put into the national treasury, forty percent are for the merchants to build more factories, is it alright? This not only will settle the refugees, but also will not let the Emperor worry about Ziliujin flowing to the outside. It will also enrich the national treasury and also count as a benefit for the businessmen."

Gu Yun listened and said nothing for a long time.

He understood, Chang Geng had thought it over several times, perhaps it had all been completed before he went down to Jiangbei, but if he had put it forward at that time, he would have created a large profit, all the noble families would have tried all their might to get a piece of it. Yang Rong Gui's people even dared to steal the fund for disaster relief to add to their own pocket, let alone this.

In the end, this measure that planned to take down several birds with one stone would inevitably result in 'the treasury not having any real profit, businessmen being constrained by the many complicated layers of officials in the court, refugees being treated as livestock, only the big and small worms standing in the middle able to fill their own private pockets'.

Therefore, he intentionally intensified the contradiction between the noble families and the new officers in the court, disturbed a pool of water in Jiangbei and divided the noble families with their linked branches. He planned to sit and watch how lawless they could be, then retreated behind the scenes to avoid the front.

In the middle, there were several accidents beyond the control of humans, who knew that after having several setbacks, it actually also let him achieve all his set goals.

Chang Geng blinked his eyes. "How is it?"

Gu Yun returned to his senses and said without a proper start or finish, "If one does not know better, they would assume you are a disaster sent by heaven."

His sentence was off the wall, but Chang Geng understood it. He dragged himself beside Gu Yun, touched Gu Yun's shoulder and said,

"Great Liang's fate stands behind me, do you believe it?"

When Gu Yun turned around, Chang Geng took the right moment to throw himself at him and let Gu Yun's lips brush by his cheeks.

Chang Geng: "You kissed me."

Gu Yun: "..."

Weren't we talking business right now?

Chang Geng hugged his neck and wrapped his arms around him, pushing the strong fragrance of sweet-scented osmanthus between Gu Yun's lips. Gu Yun had no objection to the 'soft, fragrant, and warm jade' throwing himself into his arms, offering affection. Unfortunately, at moments like this, His Highness would no longer obediently pretend to be the 'soft, fragrant, and warm jade'.

In private matters, a beauty's lips and tongue were of utmost importance, seemingly honey-laden, the taste of the loved one was the most superior delicacy in the world. 'Tasting fragrance' should go from shallow to deep, tasting and appreciating carefully.

But Chang Geng did not cooperate very well. Although he was obedient at the beginning, he ended up showing his fierceness after a while. It was not like lingering, but a bit like eating, making Gu Yun feel that this 'delicacy' was a bit 'prickly'. The two could hardly be separated. The tip of their tongues were numb, but Chang Geng was still not satisfied, gently biting on his neck and chin passionately, as if he was looking for a place to bite, more like wanting to eat him.

The key point of the throat was treated as a rod for teeth grinding. Gu Yun instinctively tensed, but was reluctant to push him away, started to feel incredibly ticklish, not knowing whether to laugh or cry, "Were you bitten by a dog when you were a child?"

Chang Geng stared at him with burning gaze. "The ban imposed on me by Miss Chen is almost expired, is it not?"

Chapter 98: What is love? Changgu is.

Chapter 98: Overturn

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The whole Great Liang was set ablaze by a fire, as if they were going to make up for two dynasties they spent idly eating salary.

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Gu Yun reached over and caressed Chang Geng's waist gently, not strong to the point of making the other feel invaded, but also teasing just enough. The temperature of his palm gradually soaked through the clothing, like rubbing a flame that was not scorching, not light nor heavy on Chang Geng's body.

Chang Geng truly went mad from missing him so much. When he was in Jiangbei Camp, he had been longing to get intimate once, after many ups and downs, it had dragged on and struggled until today.

No matter how much spring and autumn were in his heart, Chang Geng's body was only in his twenties after all. Never experiencing that feeling was one thing, but he was interfered with by Miss Chen as soon as he learned of this taste. If it weren't for many important business, the string in his heart never loosened, he would have soon turned mad from enduring.

Right now as Gu Yun only touched him slightly, half of his body went numb. He gasped for a few breaths, his ears buzzing, Chang Geng asked in a low voice, "Yifu, do you want my life?"

Gu Yun: "Your wounds don't hurt anymore?"

It was still painful, but the pain from before was of a different type than in this moment. His Royal Highness's injuries usually hurt normally. When acting spoiled and wanting kisses, it was ‘very painful’. At present, even if his wound broke open again and blood flowed into a river, he will be made of copper skin and iron bone, not knowing either pain or itch.

"If it doesn't hurt," Gu Yun said with a casual smile, grabbing Chang Geng's hand currently moving inside his clothes, taking it out and throwing it aside. "Let's settle your debt with me."

Chang Geng: "..."

Gu Yun pillowed his hand behind his head, leaning back on the bed in a relaxed posture. One hand was still gently supporting Chang Geng's waist. His voice was not very strict, but the content could make one break out in a sweat.

Gu Yun: "Tell me, what were you thinking, when you bravely rushed into the bandit's den with a scholar who does not have the strength to tie a chicken?"

Chang Geng: "Zi Xi..."

"No need for Zi Xi," Gu Yun said lightly. "You can continue to call ‘yifu’."

Chang Geng revealed a stiff smile, giving him a few kisses. Chang Geng recently discovered — Gu Yun liked this type of sticky kisses very much. He pecked a few times and then looked at him with that kind of careful eyes, basically anything he said, Gu Yun would go along with it...

But this trick didn't seem to work at this moment.

Gu Yun raised his eyebrow slightly. "You don't have to be so polite. My wound doesn't hurt."

The wise *Yan Wang* finally ran out of strategy, he had to honestly say, "I didn't expect that they would really rise up."

Gu Yun gave a very indulgent smile, rubbed Chang Geng's cheek with the back of his hand, then said mercilessly, "Nonsense, you must have expected it."

Chang Geng's throat slightly moved: "I... Master Xu and I were on our way to the headquarters at that time. We didn't know in advance that they would choose that moment to..."

"Ah," Gu Yun nodded. "Then you see that this is a once in a lifetime chance for you to find death, thus you hurriedly charged into it."

Chang Geng could hear the hidden meaning in it. Feeling that this situation was off, he quickly and cleverly admitted to his mistake: "I was wrong."

Gu Yun put his hand down, no emotion could be detected on his face, a pair of peach blossom eyes half closed, even Chang Geng could not understand what he was thinking for a moment. He could not help but become quite nervous.

However, he waited for a long time, Gu Yun did not spit out his anger, but suddenly asked, "Was it because I asked you that day '*When can we settle the refugees, when can we recover the Jiangnan',* that gave you pressure?"

When he said this, there was a wrinkle in his eyebrow, and his expression was almost lonely. Chang Geng had only seen it once on the Red Kite on New Year's Eve, when Gu Yun used three cups of wine at that time to offer sacrifices to thousands of dead souls. His face was very lonesome and quiet that the bright lights of the entire capital could not light up his profile.

Chang Geng almost panicked for a moment, his words becoming incoherent: "I am not... I... Zi Xi..."

When Gu Yun was young, he did not like to talk about his feelings with others — it was for no other reason. He felt that hanging all joys and sorrows on his face was like opening his clothes at any time to show others his skin and flesh. It was very indecent, and others might not want to see them either.

It had nothing to do with being happy or unhappy. It was purely a teaching from the family. In daytime, a group of people sitting together eating meat and drinking alcohol, only when they get drunk would they show their difference. Some people will cry and shout wildly, while others will only sing at most.

Untimely words rolled on Gu Yun's tongue several times, floated

up and sank again. Finally, he opened his mouth as if to try: "While coming here from the capital, I..."

Chang Geng's observant skill was very sharp, he could feel what he was going to say in a blink of an eye. His pupils shrank slightly, he looked at Gu Yun with both panic and expectation.

Perhaps Gu Yun had never said such difficult words aloud in his life, he almost ran from it.

Chang Geng: "How were you while you were on your way?

Gu Yun: "...My heart was burning with anxiety."

Chang Geng looked at him in a daze.

That year, when the whole army of Jiangnan Navy was overthrown and the Black Iron Camp was damaged more than half, while Gu Yun himself was just released from the prison by Li Feng in a hurry, did he ever mention the words 'burning with anxiety'?

Never.

Gu Yun seemed to forever remain stable, never panicking, and even if he was in a panic, it was mostly a pretense.

He was too strong it almost appeared false, making people always have a feeling that it was unreal, suspecting that one day he will be like the tall and grand Nine Gates of the Imperial City, suddenly collapsing.

Gu Yun seemed to have opened a locked gate for a long time. Once these words are out, the latter came smoothly: "If something really happened to you this time...what am I supposed to do?"

Chang Geng looked at him, not daring to breathe.

Gu Yun: "Chang Geng, I truly have no strength left to...place someone else in my heart anymore."

Chang Geng was shakened.

Gu Yun had the strength to stabilize the north and south, had the strength to not close his eyes in death as long as the country was still not at peace, and the strength to spent sleepless nights discussing with General Zhong about the establishment of the Jiangbei Naval Army.

But there was no strength left to love someone else anymore.

Over the years, besides Shen Yi, a friend who he had been through life and death with, Gu Yun seemed to have only one Marquis manor with a few people left. All the efforts he could squeeze out were all placed on the sensitive and anxious teenager handed over to him by the former emperor many years ago.

In interacting between officials, flattering each other were inevitable. When it came to Marshal Gu, the words ‘dedicated and selfless’ were mostly used. But in reality, Gu Yun was not purely selfless, thinking about it carefully, he truly had nothing of ‘himself’.

This kind of loneliness, Gu Yun did not have a deep awareness for it when he was a teenager. At that time, he was the Marquis of the Black Iron camp's three factions. Even with thousands of grievances and indignation, with a pot of hot wine, he would be able to get up in a fresh mood and forget everything the next day.

Now, as he grew older, thinking a lot more, he found that the carefree attitude from his early years had dissipated a lot without him knowing. Especially recently, he felt that he was particularly easy to get tired, and as his body was tired, his heart was often not in a good mood.

If it wasn't for one *Yan Wang* who sometimes managed everything carefully, sometimes turning mad and causing him to worry, then his life would have been tasteless.

Gu Yun's exhaustion and loneliness flashed by, but was retracted back in the blink of an eye. He placed Chang Geng down gently.

He pulled a thin blanket spread on one side and laid it on Chang Geng. He sighed, "Lie down, you can't even straighten your waist but you still want to do it, are you serious?"

Chang Geng grasped his hand. Gu Yun's hand would never warm up. It was always as if he had just taken it off from a Wind Slasher. It was dry and rough: "Zi Xi, can you lay with me for a while?"

Gu Yun did not hesitate to remove his outer robe and lie next to him. He hugged Chang Geng through the thin blanket and soon fell asleep.

Only then did Geng open his eyes quietly. He felt that every hair on his body was trembling to drag the person on the next pillow towards him and entangle together to his heart's content. However, he couldn't bear to destroy the quiet and warm atmosphere of this moment, thus he remained unmoving while being burned up by the flames of lust, enduring in both discomfort and happiness.

It has been almost eleven years since Gu Yun picked him up in the town of Yan Hui. In these eleven years, Gu Yun had spent more time in the frontier and in the battlefield, they had spent more time far apart than near each other. But he had never left Chang Geng's heart and soul for even a day.

Sometimes Chang Geng did not know how to love him properly. He always felt that it was difficult to repay him even if he used all of his life. Suddenly, he realized that Gu Yun was not the only fortunate thing he had ever met in his life, but rather, all the difficulties he had suffered since his birth, was in order to save up enough luck to meet this man.

As soon as he thought so, every knot in his heart was unravelled like a miracle.

Yan Wang was injured in Jiangnan. Xu Ling stepped forward to handle everything, Master Xu was someone who did not eat either hard or soft, and no one knew where he managed to find Du Long, the son of Du Wan Quan. Young Master Du did not speak much, but he was not at all easy to fool, the difficulty in bribing him was also too high. Their family was so incredibly rich that even the Emperor owed a lot to them, a bits of meager gifts were not worth bringing up to this man.

At the end of September, Xu Ling, under the guidance of *Yan Wang* and the full support of Jiangbei Camp, calmed the mob rebellion and resettled refugees in Jiangbei. Then, as Yao Chen was serving as a temporary governor of Liangjiang, Xu Ling returned to the capital with the papers from *Yan Wang*.

At this time, the curtain of this nationwide case came to an end.

Yan Wang himself still lingered while recovering his wounds and strolled back to the capital without appearing. The vigorous campaign of 'Canal Corridor' initiated by him had already taken root. His papers only stayed in the palace for only two days when the Grand Court Meeting arrived, the Grand Council tried their best to support. The two departments were rarely quiet, several great families were busy gathering together their internal forces. They had no mind to pay attention to anything else. Fang Qin was temporarily dormant, and Emperor Long An gave his approval on the same day.

The Grand Council that quickly predicted this situation showed their incredible display of efficiency. In two days, a complete plan was worked out, making people suspect that they already prepared everything beforehand.

Less than a month later, a Canal Office was set up outside the six ministries. The Canal Office fully represented the court and contacted Du Wan Quan and other members of the trading group. Du God of Wealth transformed himself into a true imperial businessman.

Various resources and materials that had been privately allocated were sent to the area for factory building endlessly. The entire court up and down did not sleep and rest for an entire month, exhausting a large number of civilian officers who could only lean on their desks on regular days. The whole Great Liang was set ablaze by a fire, as if they were going to make up for two dynasties they spent idly eating salary.

Finally, before the deadly cold of mid-winter, the refugees from Liangjiang were gathered under the tents of the preliminary factory

buildings.

Only then did *Yan Wang* Li Min return to the capital.

The author has something to say:

Written on mobile phone ＝w＝

Chapter 99: Turbulence

—

Your Highness, do you not want your dignity anymore?

—

The reason for this delay was that although Gu Yun had rushed back and forth between the capital city and Jiangbei, there were still many things to be done in the front line, just in time to let Chang Geng rest until his daily routines were no longer hindered by the injuries, only then did the two men depart for their return.

On the way back, they happened to run into a busy area along the canal.

The factories under construction were always not very pleasant-looking, dust was everywhere. Coming in and out, whether it was the craftsmen working hard, or the officials and merchants who were sent down, everyone's faces were dirty, but they were still in order.

The workers had two meals a day. After noon, a group of young and vigorous refugees who had just laid down their butcher knives gathered together and fished out cakes from the tin cart to eat.

Gu Yun once wore disguises and walked around anonymously. He saw that after being broken apart, the filling of those cakes was very good, with proper millet and felt heavy in the hand. It was not comparable to the precious and rare delicacy on Qi Yuan Tower from the capital city in that year. It could not even be described as a simple meal, but a group of strong men who had just finished their work gathered together, each held one piece of dry food, dipped in soy sauce brought from the foreman's home, eating together, it could make one feel a peace of mind.

Near the outskirts of the capital, Gu Yun rode along with Chang Geng's carriage and chatted about this along the way. Chang Geng laughed and said, "The craftsmen may be invited from outside. They come to work as foremen to lead everyone in working. Most of the remaining workers are directly recruited by Master Du from the

refugees. In the future, where they had carried the bricks is where they will make a living. For this reason, I heard that Master Du asked for a decree from the Canal Department, guaranteeing in the name of the court that unless one wanted to go, the factory would not drive people out. They will belong to this place for the rest of their lives."

No one was more eager to take root and build their own new homes than the refugees who had drifted away. In order to build their new families, they can do their work steadily and quickly without any trickery. Du Wan Quan only needed to manage their meals, even saving a lot of money for labor. Oftentimes, there were old grandmothers who would call him 'Charitable Du' behind his back, when they worshipped Bodhisattvas, there was always with his share. This God of Wealth was truly smart.

"This is a good thing," Gu Yun thought for a moment, and asked, "except for not reducing taxes, It's a bit like a military household. It's just that civilians are not the same as the army. What if there is someone who doesn't do their job or commits a crime?"

"Regulations have been issued by the Grand Council," Chang Geng said. "Before I left, I had instructed Jiang Han Shi. It has been sent along with the imperial decree. There are thirteen rules in it. After they finish their work every night, someone in charge will come to explain this to them. If the evidence proves to be correct, the local branch of the Canal Department can fire them... Why, do you still worry about workers being bullied in case of collusion between government and business in the future?"

Gu Yun was dumbfounded, then laughed and said, "What, there even is a solution for that?"

"Yes," said Chang Geng, "For people who have worked for the factory for over ten years, if half the amount of workers are willing to guarantee, the person can stay, moreover, they can bring it up to the Canal Department at the next level. In fact, even if we do this, after a long time problems are inevitable. When that happens, we can slowly make changes, it is impossible to finish in one time."

Gu Yun: "How long have you planned this?"

"It was not me who came up with it," Chang Geng laughed. "It's only when I first came into contact with Master Du that I had a vague idea. After a long time of paving the way and discussing, negotiating nonstop with them, it took me more than a year to polish it. Master Du and his group have traveled south and north all their lives, taking many trips across the Western Ocean. Their knowledge is vast and they are quick in reaction, they only lack a ladder. I only needed to set up a ladder for him, he can handle the rest."

Scholars have the meticulousness and sentiment of scholars, businessmen have the cunning and skills of businessmen. Essentially there was no good or bad, one could only see which way the upper people were willing to lead them according to the situation.

"By the way, Zi Xi, I also heard Master Du say that Westerners have this type of very long and large car," Chang Geng said excitedly, looking out from the window of the carriage. "It runs very fast on metal rails, but it is unlike the Large Eagle and the Giant Kite, it can pull many sections behind it. Won't it carry as many things as you want? It's much better than the canal waterway, but its size was rather large and runs on a long distance, it is not easy to coordinate, just in time for us to use this opportunity of land acquisition for factory construction to leave a space for that thing."

"I really have to thank the Yang-Lu Party for its diligence in buying houses and land, saving me a lot of work. Master Du planned to start with the path along the canal and invite someone to build one for trial. Right now with the struggle in Jiangnan's frontline, rations, *Ziliujin*, and machine from the capital would be troublesome to transport, if it could be built one day..."

Gu Yun did not have much bright ideas on the matter of the national economy and people's livelihood, but he was extremely keen on defense and military affairs. He understood Chang Geng's meaning with just one word and quickly said, "Can you elaborate more on it?"

But Chang Geng did not continue, he waved at him as if he intended to whisper. Gu Yun urged his horse to catch up a little, bent down slightly and asked, "What's the matter, is there something that can't be revealed now?"

"It's not that I can't tell you, just..." Chang Geng hesitated slightly.

Gu Yun was at a loss for a moment. He didn't reflect on the reason for this confidentiality. At that moment, Chang Geng popped his head out of the carriage and quickly took advantage of his lips.

Gu Yun: "..."

Chang Geng swept a glance around and saw that with the carriage blocking, nobody was paying attention. He whispered, "After we are home tonight, go along with me once more and I'll show you the drawings."

Gu Yun took the reins and leaned back gently. "How many times have I went along with you? If it wasn't acting spoiled using the injuries then it is playing tricks on me — no way."

Chang Geng was good in every aspect, only that he had a strong desire for control, especially towards Gu Yun, wishing that he could do such things as changing his clothes for him and feeding him food. In regular days, he would deliberately restrain himself and try not to make Gu Yun uncomfortable. But when they get to bed, he was no longer able to pay that much attention.

Chang Geng whispered softly, "Yifu, if I did not serve you well, I can put my heart into learning more."

Gu Yun: "... Son, you don't have to work so hard."

Having passed where Jiangbei Camp was stationed, Gu Yun did not wear armor, he had on only a casual gown, the sleeves were even wider than his waist.

Chang Geng grabbed his sleeve and shook it silently from side to side.

On their way through a village and town, they happened to see a three or four-year-old child pulling its parents sleeve crying for candy. Ever since then, no one knew which nerve of Chang Geng was fried, he copied the action exactly, seemingly wanted to bring it to the next level.

When he was a child, there was no sleeve in the world for him to pull. Now, even if he was already a grown man standing tall, he always seemed to have regrets and wanted to make up for all of it with Gu Yun.

Gu Yun laughed and felt goosebumps raised up: "I already said no, just let go. Your Highness, do you not want your dignity anymore?"

Chang Geng refused to let go, and there was a tendency that he would not rest until his sleeve was served in public.

When Shen Yi and Jiang Chong led people out of the city to welcome them, they saw *Yan Wang* sitting in his carriage, poking his head out talking to Gu Yun. Gu Yun let his steed wander lazily, with a little hint of a smile in his eyes and lips tightened in indifference.

Yan Wang first said something. Gu Yun knocked on the back of his hand, forcing him to release his hand involuntarily.

Yan Wang seemed to have not given up, he said something again. Gu Yun pulled down the curtain of his carriage as if to put him out of sight, out of mind.

The third time *Yan Wang* lifted up the curtain and poked his head out, Gu Yun finally could not help but burst into laughter, waving his hand as if already defeated, he seemed to have compromised.

Jiang Chong was stunned.

Shen Yi sighed, "It is fortunate that the Marshal has no blood-related children. Otherwise, he would have created a mischievous devil from his spoiling. I don't think he can say no three times to His Highness *Yan Wang*. If he does not agree in the first two times he was asked, he would in the third."

Jiang Chong has not yet returned to his senses, "I thought that since the Marquis was not in the capital for a long time, there is only the title of adoptive father and son between him and *Yan Wang*, but it seems that their affection is really deep."

When Shen Yi heard the word 'affection', his train of thought

deviated, his feelings as to how Gu Yun was unable to act as a strict father had made a turn. He scolded in his heart, "This Gu Zi Xi blinded by beauty could never be proper for his entire life, what on earth is he doing in broad daylight?"

Gu Yun 'blinded by beauty' felt his nose itch, he twisted his head and sneezed. As soon as he turned back, he saw Master Jiang with a face full of the sentiment 'watching the two officers* at peace, my heart rejoices', and Governor Shen with the words 'paying attention to your image, are you not afraid of losing your dignity' written angrily on his forehead.

**referring to the two highest positions in civil and military.*

The once again dignified *Yan Wang* was invited into the palace before he could get out of the carriage.

Shen Yi constantly gave Gu Yun a condemning glare. Gu Yun, who had just promised a very humiliating and disgraceful deed, was currently regretting it. He asked angrily, "What are you looking at?"

Governor Shen, an old scholar, reproached with righteousness, "It's not that I want to be lengthy, but you can be so improper sometimes!"

Gu Yun: "What's wrong with me?"

Shen Yi: "Like a lecher who had his soul hooked by a fox spirit."

Gu Yun: "..."

It was a general injustice of 'thunder rumbling in winter' and 'snow falling in summer', it was impossible to justify himself even with a hundred mouths...he truly wanted to sever ties with this Shen.

Fortunately, before he had time to lay a murderous hand against Governor Shen, Shen Yi had blocked his mouth with business: "I thought you would arrive here in a few days, so I didn't send a messenger. There are two important things needed to be said to you. First, Jia Lai Ying Huo of the Northern Man had sent an envoy."

Gu Yun's face changed.

Since the Black Iron Camp slowed down and calmed down the western turmoil, it had been stationed eagerly northward, which has largely relieved the pressure of defense in the Northern Frontier. The Black Iron Camp was a lifelong nightmare of Jia Lai Ying Huo. With them there, the Wolf King of the Eighteen Tribes dared not move recklessly.

But the Northern Frontier had always been barren, even raising cattle and sheep had to depend on the gods. In this battle, even Great Liang used up all their resources, let alone that Jia Lai whose thought was full of vengeance and neglected producing.

In the long run, it's natural that they could no longer hold on.

Gu Yun: "Came for a peace treaty?"

"Yeah," said Shen Yi, nodding, "This matter had not been brought up to the Grand Court Meeting yet. The Emperor called us into the palace to discuss the terms of the other side. Do you know how I feel?"

Gu Yun eyebrows twitched.

Shen Yi said, "It was the same as when the old Wolf King offered *Ziliujin* and proposed to be the hostage back then. It was well-spoken, humble, and sincere. The conditions are very pleasant. Zi Xi, do you trust them?

Gu Yun was silent for a moment and slowly said, "I don't. The Barbarians are different from the Westerners. The Westerners are just greedy, but the Barbarians had harbored hatred for generations — especially Jia Lai."

Shen Yi asked hurriedly, "What do you mean?"

"Since Jia Lai took over the Eighteen Tribes, he has done nothing but seek vengeance on the Central Plains," Gu Yun said. "There are only two possibilities for them to come for a truce now. Either Jia Lai has been usurped by someone from inside their Eighteen Tribes, or he has ulterior motives."

Shen Yi: "We can't rule out the possibility that the Eighteen Tribes

can no longer survive..."

"No, it's not winter yet. I don't believe they're on their last leg," Gu Yun said. "Listen to me, Jia Lai is a mad dog. Mad dogs don't care whether they eat meat or grass. They only bite people. By the way, what did the Emperor say?"

"The Emperor..." Shen Yi paused and lowered his voice. "This is the second thing I want to tell you. the Emperor did not seem very healthy recently."

Gu Yun was stunned.

"Now the Grand Court Meeting will be changed to be held once every fifteen days, on the first and fifteenth of each month, all the other important matters that need to be discussed will be taken to the Small Court Meeting and handed over to the Grand Council to be brought up to the West Warm Pavilion and wait for the Emperor's approval. I feel that the Emperor can no longer stand the loudmouth people arguing on the court meeting."

Shen Yi said in a small voice. "On the court meeting this month, as soon as the servant announced that the court was dismissed, the Emperor stood up and stepped on his own dragon robe, almost rolled down from the throne hall on the spot and was quickly caught by the attendants. As a result, here..."

Shen Yi pointed to his leg: "Directly broke it and has not been able to get up from bed even now. I think that might be the reason why he hurried to call *Yan Wang* into the palace."

Gu Yun was surprised: "Can one fall break a bone? How fragile. This is too much of a coincidence."

"The doctors dared not speak. Later, they asked Miss Chen to come take a look. Miss Chen said that after many years of overwork and irregular diet, the bones have softened, breaking easily with just one fall. Some people said that the former Emperor was also..."

No wonder the doctors kept silent. Only Chen Qing Xu, who often traveled to the border, dared to tell the truth.

The country had truly worn a person out.

Shen Yi looked around and saw that all the people and horses who came to greet *Yan Wang* had followed after Jiang Chong, Gu Yun left his guards in the Northern Camp. There were only a few generals around him. He lowered his voice and said to Gu Yun in an almost whisper, "Because of the Lu family incident, the consort was also implicated and was directly stripped off of the position. There was nothing wrong on the outside, but in fact, she was basically sent to the Cold Palace. The prince is so small, his mother's family is not of much help, if the Emperor really... say, what is he eagerly calling *Yan Wang* into the palace for? Is he entrusting his child or..."

Gu Yun looked at him, Shen Yi shut up automatically.

When the imperial city was about to break down, Li Feng did mention the matter of passing on the throne, not to the prince, but to *Yan Wang*.

In the case of the collapsing country of that time, the little prince truly did not have the power to undertake the responsibility of the Li family. Now, although the country had not yet recovered, the Man has sent an envoy to seek peace. After several years of recuperation, they could go out to battle. Will the Emperor still pass on the throne to his brother and not his son?

Gu Yun suddenly remembered the unrelated words Li Feng suddenly mentioned to him when the imperial army rebelled — "*Yan Wang* was abused by the barbarian woman when he was a child"——

Li Feng didn't seem to be the type of person who would take the initiative and ask him, there's a chance that Chang Geng told him on his own will. What kind of occasion would it be?

Although Chang Geng and Li Feng were brothers, they were not close. Gu Yun understood that wolf cub Chang Geng well, if it was not a loved one, he would not let anyone pet even a hair. It was impossible for him to take the initiative to confess his childhood wounds to win sympathy, unless...

Gu Yun's mind flashed and suddenly thought of a possibility:

That's right, *Yan Wang* had come of age and has been crowned for several years, why did nobody care about his marriage? Even if it's inconvenient for others to mention it, would Li Feng also forget?

So the second half of Emperor Long An's mindless remark on that day may have been: "He's not willing to marry a wife and have children due to this problem."

If *Yan Wang* had no offspring, it would mean that no matter what happens in the future, nothing could shake the position of the little prince, there was a possibility that Li Feng would truly entrust his orphan child to Chang Geng.

And Li Feng had always let the little prince interact with him. On one hand, it was to ease their relationship, on the other hand, it was to pave the way for his son!

The minds of these people...

Shen Yi: "Do you think it is possible for the Emperor to pass on the throne to *Yan Wang*?"

"Shh - don't mention it anymore," Gu Yun said. "Don't get mixed up in this. Remember what our job is."

Shen Yi hurriedly agreed, "In fact, I have one more thing... uhm, it's a private matter."

Gu Yun looked at Shen Yi in surprise. "What?"

Shen Yi scratched his head for a moment. "Are you close with Miss Chen?"

☻☻☻

Sorry for the delay in the update, Emi hasn't been feeling well the past few days ;~;

Chapter 100: Wind Rising

To make up for last time's delay, Emi worked on this chap fast ^^ Happy 100th chapter to everyone ;w;

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A brewing storm was gathering once again.

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Gu Yun was still immersed in Li Feng's broken leg and the Man's envoy. He momentarily did not realize and answered in confusion, "Miss Chen? I can't say I'm close to her - she doesn't talk to people very much, why?"

Shen Yi said with discontent, "She doesn't mind exhaustion serving as a military doctor for you in that godforsaken Northwest area for so long, yet you can only say one line of 'not very close'?"

The words 'coldhearted and fickle' were vividly visible on Governor Shen's face.

Gu Yun: "... Huh?"

Shen Yi looked at him angrily.

Two people - one with his thoughts on the clouds, one furious - did not understand one another, staring at each other for a long time, Gu Yun finally reacted a little, giving Shen Yi a strange look: "What do you mean?"

The usually chattering Shen Yi in the past suddenly closed his mouth, his cheeks were tight, appearing like a martyr who would rather die than speak up. He met Gu Yun's hostile eyes with great vigor and became a mouthless gourd.

Gu Yun raised his eyebrows innocently, stretched out a finger and poked Shen Yi's chest: "I said, Lord Shen, did the wisemen not teach you not to ask about improper things? In broad daylight, you and me, two single men, gathered together to inquire about the affairs of a

grown woman from another family, where is your dignity?"

He remembered Shen Yi's rude and merciless remarks from just now, immediately taking the opportunity to give him a stab in return: "Despicable!"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun managed to catch a large weak point of Shen Yi from out of nowhere. He was in a very good mood, his waist was no longer sore and his back was no longer painful. He ushered his horse forward, whistling a tune that sounded not much different than his flute playing ability.

"Gu Zi Xi!" Shen Yi gritted his teeth, catching up with him. "You... You..."

You bastard!

In broad daylight, to avoid insulting his superior on the open street, Shen Yi used all his strength to suppress the latter part of the sentence.

After Gu Yun had entertained himself enough using Shen Yi. They had already dismissed their family guards and walked to the Imperial City together. Only then did he say with seriousness: "Miss Chen's character is not bad, she also has a lot of ability - as for the likes of you, I guess she should have no problem beating three or five at a time."

Although this sentence asked for a beating of its own, yet Shen Yi did not feel offended at this moment, he listened with relish - especially when Gu Yun talked about the first time he met Chen Qing Xu on the traitor's ship many years ago, Shen Yi sighed with grief and regret, wishing that he could insert himself into that moment.

"As for her temperament, likes and dislikes... I don't know very well either. Maybe Chang Geng is even closer with her." Gu Yun said, "But there is one thing, I need to tell you about her family background."

"Chen family of the Shanxi manor, I know," Shen Yi answered. "With many generations of doctors, practicing medicine to save people.

Their family style is very clean and honest."

Gu Yun gave a slight huff: "You investigate so thoroughly, are you planning to come and ask for her hand in marriage?"

Shen Yi said, "Three letters and six etiquettes*, of course, cannot be lacking."

*traditional Chinese pre-wedding custom

Gu Yun: "..."

This brother of his was an odd person. In his early years, he read a basket of books and was deeply poisoned by the family traditions. However, people only teach etiquette to outsiders, proper and decent towards outsiders. After closing the door, they each showed their dirty side only to themselves, not affecting anyone, they all understood each other's false image of decency.

Only this Shen was different. From an outsider's point of view, he abandoned Han Lin to enter Ling Shu, and later degenerated into the rank of soldier, infamous for 'deviating from the classics and betraying the Tao'. But inside, he was a true upright and proper man of 'see no evil, hear no evil', to the point of even though he had been mingling with a group of veteran soldiers all day long, he was not stained with their mud for over ten years.

During this period, Chen Qing Xu stayed in the capital, experienced both great and minor disturbances together, Miss Chen of Lin Yuan Pavilion probably had a lot of contact with Shen Yi. However, throughout all these interactions, this Shen did not dare to say anything to her in person, he could only dare to come and inquire Gu Yun about it behind her back.

It seemed that he might not even understand the involvement of the Chen family and Lin Yuan Pavilion and still feel that Chen Qing Xu was simply dedicated to serving the country!

Gu Yun sighed. Shen Yi, this type of wooden block truly did not have the manners of being his underling for even the slightest.

"Then let me tell you something you don't know, don't tell anyone.

Chen's family in Shanxi is not an ordinary doctor family. They are the strong beam of Lin Yuan Pavilion," Gu Yun whispered. "I heard Old Zhong mention once that Miss Chen is the head of Chen's family in this generation. If that's the case, she's unlikely to be able to marry you as a governor's wife."

Shen Yi was stunned immediately.

Gu Yun thought for a moment: "Otherwise, I'll go and find someone to express it on your behalf, to see what she thinks inside..."

"No, don't," Shen Yi said quickly. "That is too abrupt!"

Gu Yun: "..."

He felt that he was like a eunuch in a rush while the emperor remained leisurely. According to Shen Yi's character, he probably could not get a wife in this lifetime, thus with his vast experience, he gave advice: "This kind of thing can not be done without hurry, brother Ji Ping, if someone else were to come before you, at that point, you would have no room left to talk."

But Shen Yi thought for a moment and shook his head and said, "Let's not. I'll think about it again."

Gu Yun shook his head after hearing this, he knew too well that if a man hesitates after hearing the identity and background of the woman, it most likely means he was just 'a little interested', not to the degree where it has to be her. However, it was not convenient for him to comment on how the involved parties felt. He only said, "Alright, you can think about it first, whatever you need my help with, just say a word."

But this sentence did not enter Shen Yi's ears. He was still immersed in his own thoughts and seriously analyzed to Gu Yun. "I really didn't know of this situation before, but after hearing you said so, I also felt that it's not appropriate."

Gu Yun nodded: "Mm."

Shen Yi: "Then, there's no other choice. I have to wait until this battle is over. I will then resign and no longer serve as a general."

Gu Yun: "..."

He almost fell head first off his horse.

Shen Yi looked sorrowful, "But proposing before the battle is finished, I feel that it is quite unlucky. People like us, if we are too concerned for someone, we would easily tie our hands and feet on the battlefield. On the contrary, it's even more dangerous this way. In case something happens, won't we waste a lady's lifetime?... but I'm afraid after the war, both the flow of time and her will no longer wait for me. It's really a dilemma. Zi Xi, do you have any way to keep those miscellaneous people far away?"

"... You don't have to worry about that. As far as I know, Miss Chen herself possessed this ability." Gu Yun paused for a moment, narrowed his eyes slightly, and suddenly laughed.

Shen Yi wondered, "Why are you laughing?"

Gu Yun: "Laughing at you, graduated in literary, but running against the way of Han Lin in the next day to enter Ling Shu. After making some achievements in the Ling Shu Institute, just as some people were speculating that you will be the next successor of Master Feng Han, you bade farewell to Ling Shu Institute and entered the Black Iron Camp as a mechanic. Now, step by step, you have achieved great military achievements. In the end, you are ascending into the sky in the eyes of others. Relieving the siege of the capital city and saving the Emperor, there's a chance you will achieve higher ranks. Others think you have made very thorough calculations, but you are different, you'd rather resign for the sake of marrying a wife."

Shen Yi continued to grin in sorrow. He had no ambition. He had been following his heart of a wet nurse all these years, watching over this, taking care of that. He was only following Gu Yun around. Unfortunately, there was too much bloodshed in Gu Yun's life, causing him to accidentally become famous. What he got was not what he wanted, hence why it was nothing that he couldn't let go of.

Some people were easily changed, becoming entirely different in only a few years. While others resembled quiet waters, going through a hundred and eighty thousand miles yet their hearts remain the same.

Gu Yun looked at him and suddenly felt emotional. The feelings accumulated after hearing about the court affairs all vanished. He affectionately grabbed Shen Yi's shoulder and gave a pat.

"In the future, whatever you need Miss Chen for, you can ask me." Shen Yi did not realize the ups and downs of the mood of the Marquis of Order. Still immersed in his worries, he unconsciously started his routine of endless chattering. "But... I have no status, keeping on seeking her out like this, is it alright? Would she end up thinking that I am improper in the future? Zi Xi, tell me - no, you don't need to say anything, you're originally not very proper in the first place, I feel that..."

General Shen had entered the process of repeated self-argument and self-doubt.

Gu Yun: "..."

Although his heart need not be changed, this habit of endless nagging would be better if it could be changed.

Gu Yun felt his head ache with Shen Yi's chatter. Unable to bear it for any longer, he whipped Shen Yi's horse's buttock and took this opportunity to run away.

At the same time, the news that '*Yan Wang* was invited into the palace as soon as be arrived in the suburbs' grew wings and quickly flew into the perked up ears of the capital. Fang Qin was at home, a few of his staff and confidants were sitting around him. With the Jiangbei upheaval this time, Fang Qin had the feeling his action was all for the profits of someone else.

For Fang Qin, the Lu-Yang's party was a bit like a rotten tooth. Although it grew in the same mouth, it suffered from inflammation and caused pain from time to time. Not only did it cause difficulty in chewing, but it was often a hindrance. It was not a bad thing to have it pulled out. But he did not expect that *Yan Wang* would have so many tactics ready, the aftereffect of the pulled-out rotten tooth was too wide. Although *Yan Wang* was not in the capital, he had taken advantage of when Fang Qin had not come back to his senses to

gather the canal into his own pocket.

Now the Canal Office had been set up, factories were sprouting like mushrooms everywhere, it was already an irreversible fact. With the senses that the old fox Fang Qin honed after going through ups and downs for many years, the next step would be a series of reforms, such as farmland tax, civil and commercial trading, so on and so forth.

He was about to use the tactic of 'the mantis caught the cicada, but the bird was preying from behind'. Unexpectedly, when struggling with him, *Yan Wang* had already 'built a warehouse in the dark and built a warehouse in the open'. Thinking ten steps ahead before moving, in the end, Fang Qin still made a wrong move.

Before, when he had just taken office as the Minister of Housing, they once had a honeymoon period with the Grand Council. At that time, when the rivers and mountains fell into captivity, it was difficult to move, a pile of rubble waiting for someone for it to be rebuilt once again, no one had the mind to fight with anyone. The entire court withstood this disaster together, they were once anxious to find the slightest hope and a way out for the nation, they once respected and admired each other's talents. Who would have known that their moment of separation came so fast?

Fang Qin sometimes couldn't help but admire and envy Jiang Han Shi. If they were to switch places, he thought he would be much more talented and dependable than that Jiang Chong and Xu Ling bunch. If he didn't bear the surname Fang, even if he was only a student who had been painstakingly studied for ten years to achieve a lowly official position...

But life had many ironies - it's no use thinking about such things now. *Yan Wang* was determined to exterminate the old forces. After the upheaval in Jiangnan, this butcher knife was already revealed. Now, they resembled water and fire.

An aide opened his mouth carefully: "Sir, I heard that when foreigners invaded, the Emperor once mentioned the matter of passing on the throne to *Yan Wang*. This time, he called him into the palace in such a hurry... even after the country was at peace and the

Emperor no longer had this intention, still, the position of being an important subject to support the young prince remains. Perhaps we should think of a plan to deal with this?"

Only now did Fang Qin come back to his senses and squinted.

Another said, "Last time Yang Rong Gui rebelled using the name of *Yan Wang*, the Emperor must undoubtedly have had this thorn in his heart. But *Yan Wang* played the victim like this and took advantage of the injuries to temporarily avoid danger. Staying silent for so long... now the Emperor's doubts seem to have all been dispelled, he also took this chance to return to the capital to resume his position, I'm afraid he will soon make a big move."

In fact, Fang Qin was still a little hesitant. He stroked his beard lightly. "The Man sent their messengers, Jiangnan is still ready for war. We will still need to go out to battle for the next two or three years. The canal is on the path of growth and refugees all over the country have settled down. If we were to touch *Yan Wang* at this time, would it affect the country's fate? If that's the case, I will become a sinner who will be denounced for generations."

The chief executive laughed, "The Master's loyalty towards the court is as clear as day, inspiring admiration in others. But it is not certain that the court could no longer function if it left *Yan Wang*. Lowly businessmen, even the bunch calling themselves merchants will not be able to escape their greedy nature for profit. As long as it does not affect their profits, there is no need for them to care about whose hands the court is in?

With Master Fang's love for the country and the people, even if *Yan Wang* is absent, we can still smoothly settle the refugees and continue to go out to battles as usual - you must think carefully. *Yan Wang*'s ambition is as clear as day. With his high status, sooner or later, he will try every method to oppress us, planting his own people in. If we continue to let him run rampant, eating and devouring, one day, you and I, and all of our families will be in danger of losing our lives."

The crowd immediately echoed this sentiment.

"*Yan Wang*, though talented, acts too radically. If he is allowed to go

on like this, I'm afraid it will be a disaster to the country and the people."

"Master Fang cannot be lenient anymore. If he is allowed to take office once again, I'm afraid he won't be able to tolerate us..."

Fang Qin sighed, stretched out his hand to suppress the murmur of the whole room, turned to the trusted confidant beside him and said, "Go and fetch 'that man'."

A brewing storm was gathering once again.

Completely unaware of this, Chang Geng left the deep palace and returned to the Marquis Manor. It was unknown what Li Feng had said to him, but he looked to be in a good mood. As soon as he got home, he found Gu Yun to glue himself to, refusing to let go and delightfully eat dinner.

Gu Yun did not ask him what Li Feng said when he invited him into the palace. He could guess from his observation. He knocked off *Yan Wang*'s hand that wasn't paying attention to carrying his bowl and chopsticks but climbed on his thigh. He inadvertently said, "When are you going to return to the court to work?"

Chang Geng rubbed the back of his hand and pick up more food for Gu Yun in an effort to please him. He looked at him absently and said, "I will after a few days rest. The Emperor said that he does not have much energy right now and wants me to return to my position as soon as possible. Zi Xi, you should eat more."

Gu Yun waved his hand: "It's already too late, only have a few bites. It would be uncomfortable to eat too much. Have you heard about Jia Lai Ying Huo sending someone?"

"Mm," Chang Geng nodded. He stopped him from fetching the teacup and gave him a bowl of soup instead. "How to negotiate, it still needs Marshal Gu to have the final say."

"When a beast is seriously injured, it often pretends to be dying, luring the enemy to lay down their defense, then deliver a violent

attack. Be careful." As Gu Yun said this, he looked at Chang Geng, blowing the vegetable bits in the soup bowl away and drinking it.

Chang Geng was stunned, he suddenly felt that Gu Yun's words were not only about the barbarians but also seemingly wanted to warn him about something else.

Chapter 101: Dense Fog

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The feng shui of the Grand Council momentarily invoked confusion in others.

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Chang Geng had gone too smoothly through this period of time. First, he solved the problem of Jiangbei perfectly, all his set goals were achieved. On the way back, he was also accompanied by Gu Yun. Except for the days in Yanhui town, since Great Liang had been suffering from a shortage of troops and continuous chaos, Gu Yun seldom had the chance to be with him for such a long time. It let a person have the illusion of being able to stay by each other's side until heaven and earth grew old, completely unable to feel the silence and cold at the beginning of autumn and winter.

Chang Geng used to be extremely uneasy, cautious about everything around him, a little bit of a clue could alarm him. At that time, although his nerve was tense all day long, he was truly thorough with his calculation and seldom made mistakes. At this time, he was trapped in gentleness for many days. After one of Gu Yun's words, he was surprised that he had felt too triumphant.

Chang Geng steadied his mind and silently recalled the scene in which Li Feng summoned him to the palace for a moment and found it quite strange — the current ruler shrunk into a room filled with heady medicinal scent, the thick palace and the quiet attendants gave off the aura of gloomy whither, everywhere there was the scent of death, but Li Feng was still in his prime, how could he be senile? What would he feel inside?

For some people, when experiencing their own incompetence, they would become disheartened and willingly step back, but Li Feng would never be that kind of person. If he was so easy to give in, he would not angrily step out from the crowd when the Northern Camp’s uprising happened, nor would he board the Red Kite when soldiers surrounded the capital.

Gu Yun truly did remind him. Chang Geng was startled, a little cold sweat oozed from the back of his neck, and the delightful expression on his face quieted down.

Gu Yun knew that he had understood. This person was too smart. Sometimes, only one word was enough. Without saying more, he reached out and patted Chang Geng's head.

Chang Geng grabbed his hand and pulled it down. Gu Yun waited for his self-reflection in the meantime. He thought that at the very least, he would hear such words as '*What am I supposed to do without Zi Xi?'*. Unexpectedly, Chang Geng held his hand for a while, not only did he not reassess himself, but also made an unreasonable blame: "It's all your fault, making me delirious."

Gu Yun: "..."

Less than half a day after arriving in the capital, he had played both roles of a 'leecher' and a 'disaster', truly he was busy.

How shy and introverted was His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* when he was young? How could it be that the bigger he grew, the more shameless he was?

Gu Yun threw away Chang Geng's hand that was becoming more and more lawless. He picked up the bottle hanging on one side with his hand. Chang Geng leaped up with training and reached out to grab it, "On such a cold day, you are not allowed to drink cold wine!"

Gu Yun lifted his hand and threw the bottle from his left hand to his right, catching it lightly. The empty left hand just happened to grab Chang Geng and embraced him. He lifted his chin and gave a quick kiss. Before Chang Geng could respond, he turned around and put on his coat and laughed, "I'm going for a trip to the Northern Camp. You can sleep by yourself tonight. Read the scriptures twice before going to bed, so that you don't become delirious again."

Chang Geng: "..."

What about the matter he had promised on the way?

The Marquis of Order would swallow his words back like this!

Gu Yun was playing with him, but there was indeed business to attend to. He should have stayed in Northern Camp directly, but not feeling reassured about Chang Geng, he returned to the manor and waited for him to come back for a meal first. At present, as he had learned more about the situation in the palace, he quickly left home and rushed to the Northern Camp. The Northern Camp not only commanded the defense outside the capital, but it was also the central station for transferring all emergency military situations in the capital.

With the Man envoy arriving suddenly, Gu Yun did not feel reassured. It could be said that he would begin to worry about the state affairs after he had finished worrying about family affairs.

It was late autumn in the capital, and as soon as he went out, the irrepressible taste of winter came out and poured on his face gloomily. The night wind was becoming colder, but Gu Yun still retained the habit of wearing a single layer for many years.

Only on this day, Gu Yun had just got on his horse but not yet left the house, when suddenly, he felt that the wind of the outskirts was a bit biting. He sighed secretly and turned back, hung the cold wine bottle in the stables, and told Huo Dan to bring him a cloak to wear then hurried away.

During this time, Gu Yun has had to rush back and forth due to the refugee uprising and the rebels forcing the Emperor to abdicate, but Gu Yun's communication with Cai Fen in the Northern Frontier was not interrupted. If Jiangnan was already a tragic situation of ‘the tears of the survivors are in the dust of the earth’, he did not need to think carefully about what was going on in the Northern Frontier.

The blood feuds between the Barbarians and the Central Plains, perhaps it would last until a hundred years later, only when those of these two generations die off could they be alleviated slightly.

But now they came for a truce, what could it possibly mean?

Gu Yun just arrived at the Northern Camp, but before he even had time to drink water, Cai Fen's letter came.

The content of the letter was simple, but there was a lot of information in just a few sentences: With the two armies confronting each other for so long, each had their scouts and spies planted inside the enemies. The people lurking in the enemy's line reported that in spring, Jia Lai once fell gravely ill, from then on, they had not seen him appear again.

What was even more strange was that his eldest son, in the name of filial piety, had not been seen all day, all his duties were temporarily taken over by the second son.

Jia Lai had three sons, all were birthed by one woman. They imitated the Han system and made the eldest son as their crown prince. With the father bedridden, it was not unusual for his sons to compete with each other in displaying their filial piety. But to the point where the First Prince no longer paid any mind to affairs, letting his younger brother handle everything, was it appropriate?

According to this description, what happened in the Barbarians tribes seemed to have come to light — the talented Second Prince was unwilling to live under the shadow of his brother simply because he was born a few years too late. In some way, he had put Jia lai and the crown prince under house arrest and usurped the throne.

The current commander of the Northern Camp said, "Marshal, in addition to the thirteen conditions, the Eighteen Tribes also agreed to send Jia Lai's youngest son here as hostage, giving us a tranquilizing pill for the next stage of peace talks. General Cai had just informed that the little Man boy's carriage will enter the border soon. They have sent their pass to the court awaiting approval. I was about to send someone to the Marquis Manor, but you arrived just in time."

With that, he handed Gu Yun another booklet of documents.

The northern barbarians affair involved frontier military affairs. Before delivering to the Grand Council, the commander in charge of the Black Tiger emblem could look through it first. The booklet handed by the barbarians was very sincere. It carefully describes the Third Prince and who his servants and followers were.

The Third Prince was only fifteen years old, he was said to be

sick and frail. They were accompanied by an ambassador translator, ten young male and female slaves, twelve guards escorted them. Everyone's name and background were clearly written, even the age of the slaves and their supervisory duties were listed in detail. They strictly followed the passing-through regulations of Great Liang. Gu Yun looked over it three times from beginning to end, but did not see anything out of order.

Shen Yi said with his arms crossed on the side, "It seems that it is true, the ambitious Second Prince imprisoned his father and brother, even chased his younger brother away to be a hostage, making it easy for him to overtake the Eighteen Tribes."

"What's the advantage of dominating the Eighteen Tribes?" Gu Yun threw the document aside. He sat by the warming stove of the camp tent for a long time but was unable to warm up. At this time, he still intentionally or unintentionally put his hands close to the heat source and rubbed them gently. "If they were defeated this time, the Barbarians would not be able to fight back. Every year, the amount of *Ziliujin* they dig up will all have to be sent over as tribute, even the goddess and the Wolf King's daughter cannot be protected."

The feuds between barbarians and the Han people in the Central Plains were not something from just a day or two, as early as several dynasties ago, the nomadic people in the north had the custom of barging down south to rob when the year's harvest was not good.

The north had the fierceness of its strong people, the south had its many famous generals. Both sides have been in a stalemate, neither was able to conquer the other for a hundred years — until Great Liang took the lead in developing steam technology.

The scenery of those years, people could only get a glimpse of it from the records of history. It was the golden age of the Mechanics. The fertile land of the Central Plains was like a giant monster awakens from its slumber, iron armors springing up like bamboo shoots after a rain, Light Suit, Heavy Armor, Giant Kite, flying Eagle and so on. Thick steam rising like a tide, iron puppets spreading across the capital, the range of long and short artillery was changing with each passing day.

At the beginning, when Great Liang had not yet opened its sea route, concentrating their manpower and resources on the development of iron armor and firepower, it was once despised by the uncivilized barbarians as ‘the southerners who wasted their resources on luxury and heresy’. The Wolf King of the North had too much confidence in his claws, arrogantly missed the opportunity to sit on the clouds of *Ziliujin* to soar to the sky and was later suppressed by the Central Plains for decades unable to turn the tide. The *Ziliujin* in the territory was forced to be offered as a tribute, unable to catch up with their own steel armor technology, even now, their equipment still had to be relied on the support of the Westerners.

This blood-soaked lesson from the past could not be ignored by the Eighteen Tribes. It was impossible for them to watch Great Liang with its factories springing up, lifting the ban, and about to set off the peak period of development of fire engine and steel armor technology for the second time — if the present momentum continued to develop, if they allow Great Liang to survive the cold winter and recover slowly, perhaps the Barbarians would truly have no room left for survival.

"I dare not comment on how the Second Prince is," Gu Yun said, "but I understand Jia Lai Ying Huo. The old thing would rather die than sit idly and wait to be mangled, let alone send a son, even if he sends his father, we still have to be on guard — fetch my seal."

This night, ten or so Beacon Orders were issued from the Northern Camp, the level was the same as when the foreign soldiers came to Dagu Port. The post stations along the northwest to the capital were all equipped with additional troops ready to face a great enemy. The Ling Shu Institute sent a batch of people to the garrison of the North Defense Forces to inspect the situation of armors and prepare to go out to battle at any time.

Great Liang entered winter in the midst of the approaching storm, and soon entered a new year. However, the court was strangely quiet.

Yan Wang held the Grand Council, at the center of the whirlpool, his return made the whole court pay close attention to him, but Yan Wang was beyond everyone's expectation, he did not come back and

immediately starting the follow-up reform dramatically as Fang Qin imagined. Instead, he started ‘cooking the little fish.’*

**referring to Lao Tzu’s quote about governance: Governing a great nation is like cooking a small fish - too much handling will spoil it.*

After he returned to the capital, *Yan Wang* completely changed from his previous busy state. First, he stayed at home for half a month, then quietly appeared in the Grand Council. At the court meetings, he did not speak up very much either, as if he had returned to being the invisible young man before the war.

In regular days, he handled some daily affairs in the Grand Council. If he needed to write a summary, he wrote a summary; if they need to be sent to the palace, he sent them, completing everything within his duties thoroughly. Leaving no room for people to vilify him, it could not be described as being lazy and passive, but he will no longer exhaust himself for any extra affairs.

As far as the quantity and quality of the papers Li Feng received in the palace were concerned, whether *Yan Wang* returned or not had little effect.

Among the people who stayed until late at night in the Grand Council, there was no longer the figure of *Yan Wang*. He strolled around during the day and left in the evening, resting in time as the court dismissed. If there was no business, he would not see any visitors.

He also made a small garden in the suburbs of the capital. When Gu Yun stayed at the Northern Camp without going home, he would stroll there to plant flowers and play with birds. It took him less than half a month to cultivate the bastard bird 'receiving' from Shen's family to have a honey-coated mouth, praising anyone it would see… but its tail was now bald, Chang Geng gathered all its feathers and asked for them to be made into a shuttlecock for the little prince to play.

Li Feng's legs could almost be used again. After checking the reports every day, he could walk around the room with the help of the attendant. This day, he happened to remember to come to the

prince's study. The prince was very obedient, never playing tricks while studying. Li Feng did not disturb him, only leaning on the attendant and stood at the back door for a while. His eyes were then attracted by a small trinket on the prince's desk.

It was not an ordinary clay ornament, but a metal shelf with thin steam at the tail. There was a delicate carriage on both sides of the metal track. The body of the carriage was a Western clock, running round and round the track, circling a small flower pot in the middle. The pot was still empty, and the special ventilation holes could be seen at the bottom. Perhaps, the prince had not yet decided on what to plant inside.

Li Feng slowly walked over to take a closer look, surprising the prince, he quickly got up to pay the proper courtesy, secretly glancing at his father, afraid of being scolded for being ‘too engulfed in playing and losing his determination’.

Li Feng was probably in a good mood. He didn't seem to be angry, he only asked, "The Ministry of Household has cut down on expenditure. Aren't they not allowed to bring up these luxury playthings during these years? Where did this come from?"

The Prince dared not breathe, carefully replying: "Royal Father, this is not purchased by the Ministry of Household, it is given to me by Fourth Uncle."

Li Feng frowned slightly. "I haven't seen A Min for some time, turned out he's busy with these things?"

The attendant came forward and said, "Your Majesty, didn't your Highness *Yan Wang* request a garden from you last time? Recently, when he was not busy with his official duties, he built a warm shed in the garden, nurtured many rare flowers and plants, he also studied many types of pots with a variety of shape with Ge Ling Shu. Now, it is almost New Year's. Every family wanted to display flowers. His Highness's fresh bonsai is hard to find. You see, the carriage has water in it, and it will automatically and regularly water every day. If the light is good, after it runs several rounds, there can be a small rainbow in the water."

The Prince whispered beside him: "Uncle said what he bought were only ordinary flowers and plants from the countryside, one coin for a large bouquet. He brought them back and put them in a pot, cut them into shape, fooling the rich people with demand for highly luxurious taste very well."

Li Feng: "Nonsense, disgraceful! Last time I told him to support the prince more, was that to let him teach you how to play with flowers, walk birds, and fool people?"

As soon as his face sank, the Prince was frightened, standing aside quietly.

Li Feng put down the flowerpot heavily and asked with a straight face, "I want you to follow *Yan Wang* to learn how to govern the country. What did he teach you? Tell me."

The Prince gave him a quick look. He was terrified, but dared not answer. He returned in a soft voice, "Royal Father… Fourth Uncle taught me that governing a great country is not to spend all night and exhausted every effort. The most important thing is to make the best use of resources and people. Laws and systems are the basis of the person in charge. As long as a perfect system is established, all civil and military officials can all perform their duties, the source of the national treasury will become stable, um..."

Li Feng's eyebrows softened slightly. Hearing his son stumble, he couldn't help but press on, "Then?"

The Prince tried his best and boldly said, "... You can stay idle away from court once and for all and lazily eat imperial salary."

Li Feng: "..."

The little prince held his tongue for fear that his father would burst into anger at these preposterous words that went against every moral lessons. However, after waiting for a long time, the anticipated scolding and punishment did not fall onto him. He raised his head with trepidation and looked at Li Feng. He found that the unambiguous face of the Emperor was calm, as if lost in thought, after a while, he agreed, "He's right. A Min can see through it better

than I."

The Prince looked at him in confusion, always feeling that his father was in a very good mood today.

In the court, some blinded people thought that *Yan Wang* would be silent from now on due to Yang Rong Gui's rebellion that caused him to lose the monarch's favor, thus he dared not make any move. They boldly brought up reports accusing *Yan Wang* in secret, listing many crimes. Emperor Long An, who seldom appeared in the court meeting, made a thorough attack in court and expressed his clear intention of protecting *Yan Wang*.

Not only that, the next day, the stingy emperor unexpectedly approved an excessive expenditure of the Ministry of Household. He paid a high price for a pile of exquisite metal pots with rare shapes and bonsai from the garden of *Yan Wang* and sent them to the palaces. It could be said that Li Feng had used his own pocket money to support his little brother.

The feng shui of the Grand Council momentarily invoked confusion in others.

The accusing papers Fang Qin and others prepared were written and rewritten, all the way to the New Year, but still does not have the opportunity to deliver up. Fang Qin could not help but wonder — was it possible that there were people in this world who would overtake the responsibilities in critical times, then hand it back and take their leave without any grand ambitions?

This peaceful life lasted until the 23rd of December, when the Man's hostage arrived in the capital.

Chapter 102: Palace Banquet

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Chen Qing Xu muttered, "Impossible, then it is the blood?… Did I make an error in my assessment?"

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When Gu Yun was still in the Northwest Frontier at the beginning of the year, the whole country of Great Liang was engulfed in gloomy clouds, on the verge of losing at any moment.

But this year, the whole country was reborn with incredible vitality. Even though grand banquets and dancing of the past could no longer be seen, the children queuing on the streets to buy candy have put on their new clothes one after another. During the day, the sound of firecrackers could sometimes be heard, each and every family were also busy preparing the New Year's goods.

The collapsed city wall was rebuilt again, and the anti air net on Qi Ming Altar broadened its stern sight. The *Baihong* bows and silent iron puppets on the wall watched the unexpected visitors enter the city. The Northern Camp accompanied them stopped outside the Nine Gates in a clean and orderly manner. The absolute silence seemed to be the essence, vitality, and spirit that had been honed through blood and fire.

With this year's many ups and downs, only counting the merit of bringing the country back to life alone, in the future, history books would not lack *Yan Wang*'s name.

The Third Barbarian Prince’s carriage drove slowly through the long street. The cold wind raised the corner of the curtain, revealing a thin and pale face, but a hand immediately pulled the curtain down and blocked both sides from peeping.

At this time, Gu Yun was sitting in casual clothing on the Wangnan Tower, with a liuli glass on his nose — it was not the one

he usually used for emergency when blinded, but a kind of *Qian Li Yan* for long-distance targeting on the battlefield.

Chang Geng and Shen Yi were all present. A moment later, the door was pushed open and a figure flashed in. It was Cao Chun Hua who had disappeared into mystery since Jiangbei.

Cao Chun Hua entered the room and paid simple courtesy then sat down. "I'm thirsty to death."

Chang Geng was accustomed to it, carrying a large bowl and filling it with wine. Cao Chun Hua took it without blushing or panting and drank it dry. If someone did not know, they would have thought he was drinking cold water. Gu Yun, a drunkard, stared with wide eyes and felt like he had met a wine bottle in a human shape.

"Another bowl," Cao Chun Hua sighed comfortably. "I have been traveling back to the North since I separated from Marshal at the capital city... there were wind, snow, and rain on the journey, I have endured plenty."

Cao Chun Hua had possessed great talent in disguise since he was a child, learning foreign languages by ears, taking only half a month to be fluent. He was sent by Chang Geng to the border of Northern Frontier for a long time to keep watch, only when he needed a perfect double to travel to Jiangbei for investigation did he call him back.

Cao Chun Hua took the second bowl of wine and threw a flirtatious eye at Gu Yun who looked as if he was craving for wine, and successfully evoked Gu Yun's unforgettable memory of ‘this man who was twisting his waist and hip while wearing Chang Geng's face’.

Gu Yun silently patted off the goosebumps on his body and turned his eyes away with an ashen face.

Chang Geng: "How did you become this worn down?"

"Don't mention it anymore, counting all the male and female slaves, they are a team of elite. I can't get close to them within a mile, I have to follow after them by groveling on the ground again and

again."

Cao Chun Hua said softly and delicately with a flowery voice, "To tell the gentlemen the truth, when I was in Northern Frontier, I once sneaked into the rank of Jia Lai Ying Huo's guards, even pretended to be the female slave the Second Prince favored the most, swayed around in front of him for a day and a night without being discovered, but for more than a year, I could never approach the Third Prince, even his appearance could not be seen."

Chang Geng asked, "Can't even take a look from the distance when he travels?"

"He never goes out at all. The Eighteen Tribes said that the Third Prince is gravely ill and could not go out to the wind," Cao Chun Hua sighed. "Aside from Jia Lai Ying Huo himself, others could not even see a hair of him. The Third Prince is a taboo topic of the Eighteen Tribes. He lived inside three layers of guards. I tried to mix into the outer layer, it was successful, but the second layer is already no good, the people inside resembled iron puppets, they do not communicate, but they are all top tier masters and even suicide soldiers to boost. I tried several ways, but it was all for naught, even almost alerting them. I had to retreat first. Did Your Highness see the envoy accompanying them?"

Everyone looked towards the direction where Cao Chun Hua's chopsticks were pointed, just to see a middle-aged man turn around and speak to a guard. He was ordinary in appearance, but there was a vague unspeakable aura on his body, as robust and sturdy as a mountain.

Cao Chun Hua: "That man is the guard captain of Jia Lai and one of his most important confidants, very powerful. I will not recognize the wrong person."

Several of the people present were surprised.

Shen Yi frowned and said, "If that's the case, General Cai's news is not necessarily accurate. The usurper of the throne may be only the barbarians putting on a play of disorder to show us. Perhaps the hostage they sent this time was intending to use a vile trick."

Gu Yun did not say a word. Suddenly, he felt very uneasy.

In the ongoing war between the two countries, it was conceivable that the arrival of this group of hostage and envoys would not receive any courtesy. The Third Prince and his party did not even have one decent person to welcome them. Li Feng's instructions to Hongqi Temple were ‘act depending on the situation’. The officer of Hongqi Temple really understood the meaning of the ruler and placed the barbarian hostage in an envoy's post and left them be. On the day of residence, the city's internal defense was renewed. The newly formed Imperial Army surrounded the post station by three layers inside and outside, changing shifts half an hour and patrolling twelve times a day, regardless of day or night.

Everything seemed unusual in those two days. First came a strange and mysterious hostage of the barbarians, then Chang Geng became seriously ill at an unusual time, contracting a high fever with just a bit of cold wind from sitting on Wangnan tower.

Chang Geng practiced martial arts all year round and was very good at maintaining good health. He was in his twenties, logically, even if the wind was any stronger, it would not be able to affect him. But no one knew what was going on that day, his fever was fierce. When Gu Yun rushed back from the Northern Camp in the middle of the night, Chang Geng had already taken the medicine and went to rest, his cheeks were burning red from the fever.

Gu Yun checked his forehead and laid down on one side still in his full clothes. Whether he returned home or not, Chang Geng always occupied only half of the bed, and even with the disturbing nightmares, his sleeping posture was very orderly and he never rolled around.

Afraid that Chang Geng’s fever would burn higher at night, Gu Yun did not dare fall into a deep sleep, he woke up immediately whenever the person on the next pillow moved, when he reached out and checked, he found that Chang Geng's body was as hot as charcoal, his breathing was also erratic.

Chang Geng being disturbed by nightmares was a normal occurrence. Gu Yun was used to them. Most of the time, Chang Geng

himself would calm down as long as he reached out and held him for a little comfort. But this evening, it was probably due to illness, Chang Geng's face suddenly appeared painful. Instinctively, he grasped Gu Yun's wrist and closed his fingers tightly. He involuntarily let out a grunt, unable to wake up no matter how he was called.

Gu Yun had to reach out and take a silver needle from the small medicine bag at the head of the bed. He pressed Chang Geng down and pinch him gently on his wrist.

Chang Geng shivered then woke up.

Gu Yun's pupil shrank slightly — *double pupils.*

However, compared with the chaos of the last Bone of Impurity attack, Chang Geng obviously restrained himself a lot more, there was no frantic movement. He only looked at Gu Yun in a daze, the rims of his eyes were slightly red.

Gu Yun called out to him nervously "Chang Geng, do you still recognize me?"

Chang Geng blinked quickly, a drop of cold sweat rolled down his eyelashes. He said in a hoarse voice, "How come...you are back?"

During this sentence, the pupils in his eyes slowly merged into one and the red mark gradually disappeared, as if everything was only Gu Yun’s imagination. Gu Yun kissed him, wiped his sweat and coaxed him back to sleep. In the end, he was still not at ease. The next morning, he sent someone to the palace to take a sick leave and went to find Chen Qing Xu.

"It's alright," said Miss Chen after the check up, she diagnosed, "His Highness is in good health, but the weather has changed a little recently, he only caught a bit of cold wind. It will be alright after taking the medicine."

Chang Geng laughed and said, "I said so as well, but he didn't believe me and also made a fuss about it, troubling Miss Chen for a trip here."

Although Miss Chen was polite as usual, she truly didn't want to

look at the triumphant expression of His Highness Yan Wang any longer. Even a bride who had just given birth to her first child would not be as happy as he was.

Miss Chen could no longer bear it and bid farewell to the two, Gu Yun personally saw her off. As they passed the cold corridor of the manor, Gu Yun suddenly whispered, "The reason I invited Miss Chen here today was not to check a cold. When he had a high fever last night, his double pupils suddenly reappeared, I'm not feeling very reassured."

Chen Qing Xu immediately turned serious and frowned, "Marquis, please tell me more in details."

Gu Yun described the scene of the sudden attack then immediately sobering up of Chang Geng and asked, "What do you think about this situation?"

After listening, Chen Qing Xu was silent for a long time. Her eyes lowered slightly, she seemed to be carefully recalling the pulse she had taken just now. When Gu Yun grew nervous waiting, she said, "His Highness has strong mentality, truly inspiring admiration in others."

Gu Yun immediately responded, "You mean that his usual sanity was due to him using his will to suppress it, and yesterday, due to the fever that caused him to be confused, it was momentarily revealed?"

Chen Qing Xu nodded: "His Highness was tormented by the Bone of Impurity from childhood. He should have been used to it. Even when he falls asleep, he still keeps a little consciousness. I just worry that...he is young, strong and energetic now, if he were to grow weak from old age in the future, will he still have this kind of mental strength?"

Gu Yun, however, thought of something and asked in return, "According to you, if he were to get sick, injured, or get to drinking something that muddle his mind, it will always lead to this scenario?"

Chen Qing Xu: "That is the case according to logic, it depends on whether the situation is serious or not."

"But there is one thing I don't quite understand," Gu Yun said. "A while ago, he was injured in Jiangbei, it was me who went to pick him up. At that time, because of the excessive blood loss from the wound, he was in a coma for a whole day and night, but during this period, he was very stable. Not only did he not have an attack, but he seemed to have no symptoms of waking up from nightmares."

Chen Qing Xu was suddenly stunned.

Gu Yun: "Miss Chen?"

Chen Qing Xu muttered, "Impossible, then it is the blood?… Did I make an error in my assessment?"

Gu Yun was frightened.

Chen Qing Xu did not explain anything. She turned around and left without saying a word.

Gu Yun: "Hey... Miss Chen..."

"Let me think about it." Chen Qing Xu left this sentence and drifted away with her feet not touching the ground. In a blink of an eye, she was already a few feet away and disappeared in a flash.

Shen Yi, who happened to be visiting, was bad-mouthing about Gu Yun to Huo Dan, all the way from the gate, he had not stopped to take a breather. Commander Huo was dejected, not knowing what method he should use to get rid of this man. Before he could think of anything, Shen Yi shut up without warning.

As soon as Huo Dan looked up, he saw a ghostly white shadow sweeping by in front of his eyes. General Shen resembled a wooden board standing on top of the heaven and earth, saving his words like saving gold in the midst of nervousness: "Miss Chen."

Chen Qing Xu already did not speak much, and likewise, she returned, "General Shen."

After greeting each other, the two stared at one another for a long time, Shen Yi realized that he was blocking the way and retreated to one side in panic: "Miss Chen please!"

Chen Qing Xu originally thought he had something to say, she gave him a confused look and then blew away like a storm.

Commander Huo pulled his ears and led the suddenly muted General Shen to Gu Yun.

Gu Yun made a sound in response and changed an ice bag for Chang Geng, making the other's face twist from the cold, he then went out to meet the visitor: "What's the matter?"

Shen Yi had not yet recovered from his mute meditation and looked silently at Gu Yun as his soul travelled far.

Gu Yun was very surprised, he turned to Huo Dan and asked, "What's wrong with him?"

Huo Dan speculated, "Suddenly can't speak anymore. Maybe Doctor Chen had given him mute drugs."

Shen Yi's visit to Gu Yun was actually due to business.

Shen Yi: "The Emperor has been giving the cold shoulder to the Barbarian envoys for several days. He intends to meet them at this year's Palace Banquet and display our might. But the Barbarian witchcraft is very powerful. He is afraid that there are still some remnants left by the Barbarian women that year that had not been cleaned up. In order to prevent the scenario of the rebellion of the Imperial Army on Qi Ming altar happening for the second time, the defense of the palace is carried out by the Northern Camp, the inner guard and the newly formed Imperial Army, jointly responsible for and mutually restraining each other. The Marshal was invited to personally oversee this."

Gu Yun nodded. He understood that Li Feng was once bitten, twice shy.

This year's Palace Banquet was grand and almost wasteful, the intention of demonstrating their power was clear. The guards were strictly keeping watch on both sides. All the generals doned armour and swords, separated on both sides. Even their own people thought they had entered the Hong Men banquet* as they entered.

**refers to a historical event in 206 BC where the future Han Emperor Liu Bang was attempted to be murdered by his rival Xiang Yu in a banquet at Hongmen*

Gu Yun also saw for the first time the legendary Third Barbarian Prince that could be blown to death by a gust of wind.

The boy was at the age of fourteen or fifteen, his appearance was very delicate, but his face was pale and his complexion was dull. He never looked up. He had to follow the reminders of the servants in everything he did. As if he could not walk well, he was led to see the emperor before the imperial court.

The envoy said to Li Feng, "Emperor of Great Liang please pardon the Third Prince who was naturally born weak, if there are any disrespectful actions during the feast, please forgive him for being only a child."

Li Feng waved his hand to allow them to be at ease, but the teenager turned a deaf ear, it was clear he could not understand Mandarin.

The envoy bent down, whispered and coaxed in his ear, yet the Third Prince's blank face remained, in the end he was held up by the envoy, half-supported and half-dragged to sit at the banquet table.

Gu Yun's ear was very sharp, and he could hear someone commented beside him: "Could it be that this Third Prince is an idiot?"

What did Jia Lai Ying Huo mean by sending his idiot son to the capital as a hostage?

Gu Yun and Shen Yi who were not far from each other exchanged a look. Their expressions turned grave. He wondered if he thought too much, but Gu Yun always felt that there was something about the young man that evoked chill in him.

Just then, the display of politeness between Li Feng and the barbarians came to an end. The Barbarian envoy suddenly deliberately or unconsciously mentioned: "Before coming here from

my home country, I had heard that under the Emperor of Great Liang, there were two people who one must meet no matter what. One was Marquis Gu, an invincible hero, I was lucky to have met with him here today, but there was another…it seemed he is not present in this banquet?"

Li Feng: "I am unsure who the envoy is referring to?"

The Man envoy laughed and said, "It is the young leader of six ministries in your court, His Highness *Yan Wang*, this man still has a lot of links with our tribes."

The corners of Gu Yun's eyes slightly twitched.

Li Feng swept a glance around and found that Chang Geng was absent, he asked the servants, "Where's A Min?"

Chapter 103: Meeting

—

"Miss Chen, do you have a silver dagger?"

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While the banquet was in full swing, Chang Geng was helping Miss Chen collect herbs in the courtyard where she temporarily settled in the capital.

His cold went away as quickly as it arrived, cured after two doses of medicine. As a matter of fact, he was almost as good as before. The reason why he still took his leave was due to his sensitive background, Gu Yun had deliberately let him avoid it. Second, it was because he heard that Chen Qing Xu found new clues about Bone of Impurity.

"You mean that Bone of Impurity is in my vein?"

Chen Qing Xu's hands were full of all kinds of yellowed old books, she often had to rescue the pages fallen off. Her hands were busy, but her mouth was as orderly as before. "The Bone of Impurity damages one's mind. I always thought its root was in the brain. If it weren't for the Marquis's reminder, I would not think of this aspect... You see here — the barbarian's earliest record of the evil god Wu Er Gu - 'born malicious, eating his brother's flesh and blood, refining himself, with four feet, four arms, two hearts, blood flows in the chest like a tide, especially tyrannical', I thought that the 'blood flows like a tide' part was only a metaphor, but it actually refers to how the Bone of Impurity attacks."

Only when she talked about these things could she utter so many words at a time.

"Blood and flesh," Chang Geng was silent for a moment, shaking

his head and smiling bitterly, "What Miss Chen means is that my entire body is poison, unless I follow the myth of scraping bones and picking flesh?"

It seems that this was much worse than having a ruined mind.

Chang Geng unhurriedly sorted out the herbs and put them in containers in order. The gears on the shelves clenched together with a squeaky sound and slowly rose to the top to reveal the empty space below. This was meticulous work, it could not be done by an impetuous person.

Chen Qing Xu looked at him with admiration. There was no historical record of those who were entangled by the Bone of Impurity but could still stay sane until adulthood, let alone one who could maintain such a calm and gentle temperament.

There was no telling whether he was born with perseverance, or if he was better than the others by one Gu Yun.

Chang Geng: "To tell you the truth, I don't feel very well recently. The Bone of Impurity attacks are becoming more and more frequent."

Chen Qing Xu casually said, "The Marquis had already told me."

Chang Geng was startled for a moment, "He..."

Gu Yun always seems to follow the attitude of 'it was only the barbarian witchcraft poisoning' and never took this 'minor skin and flesh illness' seriously. He seldom talked about it and never showed any concern in front of Chang Geng.

Turned out...it had always troubled him?

Chen Qing Xu paused and realized that she had said too much. She shifted the topic, "Your Highness, if there is nothing else to instruct, I'm going to return to Chen family old residence in Shanxi. It's much easier after I find the roots, there will be a solution in the end."

"Ah," Chang Geng answered, putting his hands together, "I have troubled you, and about Zi Xi's antidote..."

He was interrupted by a visitor from the palace before he could finish.

The medicine disciple brought in a servant, who respectfully greeted Chang Geng and said, "Your Highness, the Emperor heard that you are ill, he had specially asked your servant to come and see. I also brought along a doctor, but he did not dare to enter Doctor Chen's courtyard and was waiting outside."

Chang Geng frowned: "I have troubled Royal Brother for his concern, but I only caught a regular cold, not a serious illness."

The servant laughed and said, "Yes, I also saw that Your Highness was in good spirits, eh... Your Highness, there is a banquet in the palace this evening for the Third Barbarian Prince and their group of envoys. The envoy of the Eighteen Tribes mentioned Your Highness in front of the Emperor. His Majesty ordered me to tell you that if your body isn't feeling well, there's no need to trouble yourself, if you're feeling alright, you should come join in on the fun."

Chen Qing Xu was stunned for a moment and looked up at Chang Geng quickly. If nobody said anything, it would be all right. But the Man envoy already said so, Chang Geng could not refuse. There was a dilemma in the middle of this: the Man was not only the enemy of Great Liang, but also the family of Yan Wang's mother. He certainly could not intentionally approach them, but it was not appropriate to intentionally avoid them either.

The envoy already named him, but the key to going or not was to assess Li Feng's attitude, that was the direction to avoid offending.

Chang Geng grabbed a purse from his body, stuffed something to the servant and asked, "Excuse me, what did my brother say?"

The servant measured *Yan Wang*'s generosity and laughed so much that his face blushed and said incoherently, "I dare not... *Yan Wang* is taking years from my life, and this... it's a shame to receive it..."

As he said he was ashamed, he put the money away happily and said to Chang Geng, "What kind of person is our *Yan Wang*, there's no

need for you to respect those barbarian bunch. The Emperor said that if you want to go to avoid boredom, you can come to the palace to pay New Year's greeting to him, sit around for a bit and go back, no need to interact with those people. It's the new year, the Emperor would feel more reassured seeing you."

Chang Geng understood, "Let me take a rest and change my clothes, then I will go with you to the palace."

The servant happily answered, "I will prepare you a carriage."

Chang Geng smiled and watched him leave. As soon as he turned and entered the room, his smile immediately turned cold.

Chen Qing Xu followed after him: "What can I do for you?"

Chang Geng shook his head: "This year's banquet is very strict, Zi Xi is there, the people coming in and out have to go through several inspections. For the Barbarians, except the Third Prince and the envoys, all the servants have been locked up in the post station. Even if the Barbarian Third Prince has Ziliujin flowing under his skin, there is no guarantee that he can explode into anything worthwhile - I only need to borrow a room to tidy up my attire."

Chen Qing Xu didn't understand these matters, she did not say much and asked the medicine disciple to lead the way.

Chang Geng went to the door with his arms crossed, his footsteps then halted, he turned around again. "Miss Chen, do you have a silver dagger?"

Wang Guo was sitting among the civil ministers, listening to a group of sharp-tongued civil officials vent their hatred for the country and families, using mocking words to oppress the Man envoy.

The Northern Man's envoy could not be said to have a flexible mouth, but he knew proper advance and retreat. Once the topic became too sharp for him to answer, he only laughed and did not

speak. It seemed that he really bore the burden of humiliation and came for peace talks.

Imperial Uncle Wang's eyes also paused on the silent Third Prince bowing his head, but quickly shifted his attention — he had no interest in that idiot, he had arranged a better play.

Wang Guo was different from people like Fang Qin who often talked about the national economy and people's livelihood. He knew that nobody thought highly of him. Even for Fang Qin's bunch, they only reluctantly addressed him as Master this and Lord that when they have a use for him. They all call him 'eunuch uncle' behind his back, saying that he was very 'dutiful' towards his role as an Imperial Uncle, even taking on the duty of inner management.

Wang Guo used to be a minor character who ran errands for the former emperor. He was destined to play the role of a flattering subject and bearing the ill name for the ruler. Ever since the matter of the former emperor and the barbarian concubine came to light, he had been living in fear.

He had no opinions towards Gu Yun or even the Gu family, there were few contacts between civil and martial officers in Great Liang in terms of interests. As long as neither of the party harbored great ambition and covered the sky with one hand, even in the struggle for power, they would not struggle for a single pot.

Not to mention that Gu family was the true nobility, it's just that they were few in members and their object of marriage was too special.

But Wang Guo himself and Gu Yun had no difference in viewpoints either. He had no opinions on the important affairs of the country. His only opinion was what were the proper ways to please the Emperor.

Every man in the court were grand characters, talented in martial and literary, each of them was full of ideals, there needed to be a few men such as this to allow the Emperor to relax after the battle in wisdom and courage.

If it was possible, even if he was overfed with rat poisons, he would never dare to touch the Gu family.

But fate was difficult to detangle, and a ruler's order was hard to oppose. Now the old man himself had died, at least he could still find one broken excuse of 'the ruler wants the subject to die', yet he had left him behind as a scapegoat to bear the scolding of the people.

At present, Emperor *Long An* was willing to protect this worthless being out of respect for him as an uncle, letting him continue his dying breath and beg for food.

But what about the future?

It was not horrifying how much land tax, civil and commercial trading *Yan Wang* reformed. What was horrifying was that once *Yan Wang* took the throne, what would he do to Wang Guo?

Yan Wang had a close relationship with Gu Yun since his childhood. As the son of the emperor and the barbarian concubine, it was impossible for him to investigate his parent's sins. In order to further attract Gu Yun and strive for military support in the future, the first thing he would do was to drag him out to be the offering for Gu family.

The thing Master Fang and others worried about were nothing more than how *Yan Wang* was reforming the court. In the end, it was for their own fame, fortune, and their family's future, while Imperial Uncle Wang's life hung by a string, he was constantly worried about the head on his shoulders — even if there were high positions and rich salaries, he still needed to stay alive to enjoy them.

When the Barbarians first arrived in the capital, they truly knew their place and did not bribe people all around. The nobles in the capital were not so poor, insane, and shallow-minded to the point of being willing to bear the charge of 'treason and allied with the enemy' for a little benefit.

Before the palace banquet, the envoys of the Eighteen Tribes reached out their tentacles for the first time and contacted a man — it was Imperial Uncle Wang, a seemingly insignificant flatterer.

The envoys of the Eighteen Tribes swore an oath to their god and gave Wang Guo two promises: first, let *Yan Wang* no longer be the sword hanging over his head.

Second: Whether it was a success or a failure, Wang Guo would not be implicated. If in the future, Wang Guo was backed into a dead end, the Eighteen Tribes were willing to save his life.

The mobs of the Eighteen Tribes were uncivilized, cruel, murderous, and were good at tampering with poisons, but there was one good point — they kept to their promises.

And what they wanted him to do was a simple task. *Yan Wang* most likely wanted to avoid appearing, this time, Wang Guo's job was to make sure that *Yan Wang* showed up at the palace banquet.

The barbarians didn't reveal what they were going to do. Wang Guo planned to wait and see what would happen. In case the Barbarians failed, he also prepared another scheme — thanks to Lord Fang, who kept a man secretly in his household in order to overthrow *Yan Wang*.

When the barbarian imperial concubine escaped, a large number of palace men, guards, and doctors were involved, many of them died unjustly, but the ones who were truly guilty had already prepared their way out beforehand.

The old doctor in Fang's household was one of the people who escaped that time due to fear. His son accidentally killed someone, and carrying the debts of his child, he had no choice but to sell a secret: When the Man imperial concubine escaped while pregnant, Xiu Jun Zhu who was with her was also pregnant while unmarried.

Xiu Niang Hu Ge Er colluded with the barbarians at Yanhui town and brought them inside the border. She despised Great Liang to the bone. Would she really and honestly raise her enemy's son?

Was the person Gu Yun brought back the son of the former Emperor, or a wild bastard child of Hu Ge Er whose father was unknown?

Fang Qin took in the doctor but did not act rashly. He had learned his lesson from failing to kill *Yan Wang* last time. This time, he planned to hit the target in one move, but while he was still slowly brewing the plan, Wang Guo did not want to cooperate with him anymore.

The righteous have methods of the righteous, the villains have the way of villains. Their scheme did not have to be superb, it did not matter even if it was lowly and dirty, it only needed to be effective.

When the Eighteen Tribes envoy opened his mouth inquiring about *Yan Wang*, Li Feng didn't answer immediately, but when he heard that *Yan Wang* was ill, he had asked his servant to come to check in his stead. Li Feng's original words were, "Take a doctor to see him and tell A Min to rest well. If he's better in the next few days, don't stay put in the house all the time, come into the palace to pay New Year greetings, there's no need for him to interact with those people."

After saying this, Emperor *Long An* saw it as having fulfilled his duty to appear at the Palace Banquet and took his leave.

Imperial Uncle Wang did not gain the title 'eunuch uncle' for nothing. He had soon bribed some seemingly insignificant servants running errands. As long as the words of Li Feng were skillfully bent a little, *Yan Wang* would certainly come.

After the Emperor's departure, *Yan Wang* who was taking a sick leave would deliberately come to see the Man envoy, then the story of confusing royal blood and unknown origin would come to light in front of the eyes of all people — how would he end up?

Since Li Feng left, the whole palace feast passed quietly for the most part. Nearing the end of the feast, Gu Yun finally felt a little relieved. He picked up a cup to have a sip. Before he could even taste it, the servant suddenly announced that *Yan Wang* had arrived.

Gu Yun had not yet had time to clear up his thoughts, his heart

thumped.

Fang Qin was a little surprised, but Wang Guo bowed his head. The envoy of the Eighteen Tribes turned towards the outside of the hall with a smile. The Third Barbarian Prince, who had been keeping his head down to eat and drink in the corner, stopped abruptly.

When Chang Geng entered the hall and saw at first sight that nobody was on the throne, he knew that he had fallen into someone's trap.

However, it was too late to turn back now. Chang Geng's footsteps did not stop, his slightly ill face was calm and quiet, he retained the gentle smile, walking slowly and unhurriedly, took off his cape and used this opportunity to sweep a glance around by passing it to an attendant. The servant who deceived him was nowhere to be seen.

Although one man from the noble families party did not know why *Yan Wang* appeared here, he still refused to give up the opportunity to throw stones down the well, he immediately laughed with profound meaning: "His Highness *Yan Wang* had already requested to be absent from today's banquet. But it seems that the guests of the Eighteen Tribes truly have lots of respect, actually managed to invite *Yan Wang* here with only one sentence."

Another man continued his words, "These words need to be punished, not mentioning anyone else, but today's guests are not ordinary. The Eighteen Tribes are the maternal family of His Highness, they must be treated differently."

Chang Geng's loose court attire almost fell to the ground. He calmly returned, "I have troubled the Emperor for sending his people to inquire, I especially come to the palace to pay New Year's greetings to His Majesty, but unfortunately, did His Majesty already leave?"

"*Yan Wang*'s arrival was untimely, but ours isn't. Today, we get to meet Great Liang's two talented individuals, it was a great privilege and blessing for us. Our prince also wants to offer one cup to Your Highness as respect!"

During the conversation, the envoy of the Eighteen Tribes helped the Third Prince to stand up.

Gu Yun quickly signaled Shen Yi with his eyes. Several guards hiding in the dark suddenly showed their murderous intentions and circled the barbarian envoys and the prince.

The Third Prince stepped out from the table, seemingly very nervous, his hands trembling violently all the way while carrying the wine cup. Before he could approach Chang Geng, the wine had been spill more than half.

As the teenager approached, Chang Geng's body gave birth to a dry heat that could not be suppressed. The fever that had already faded fiercely rushed forward once again. His ears roared and his blood boiled as if it were burning Ziliujin, bubbling intensely.

Chang Geng's hairs stood up, countless pairs of calculating eyes, or joyous eyes of those who delight in others misery did not exert as much pressure on him as this boy. He endured the severe discomfort, struggling to maintain the dignity of a prince and forced himself to laugh. "Why, when your tribes' prince offers wine, are they all this quiet?"

The Man envoy suddenly smiled and slowly retreated one step behind the Third Prince.

The Third Prince, shivering all over, stopped silently without warning. His hands that halted in the air were blue and white, heavy with the aura of death.

He then raised his head and looked straight into Chang Geng's eyes.

The young man's pale face had a pair of red eyes, his double pupils like an icicle, pierced Chang Geng without warning.

This boy turned out to be another Bone of Impurity!

No one knows what happens when two 'evil gods' face each other, there had never been any record of it. How much madness was in one Wu Er Gu, how much hatred could there be, how lucky could one be

to achieve one?

To what extent should an era be chaotic in order to make two Bone of Impurity meet face to face?

There seemed to be an indescribable feeling between the two for a time. The whole palace now turned into dust in front of Chang Geng's eyes. His chest was so painful that it seemed as if he was about to burst open.

All hallucinations and realities entangled together, the poison that had been suppressed in his bone and blood for many years was like scorching oil poured onto the fire, which erupted into roaring mountains and tsunamis. All the indigestible hatred and rage poured into Chang Geng's heart. All the nightmares in the abyss poured out, opening their large terrifying mouths to swallow him down.

Chapter 104: Leading Battle

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Gu Yun turned his head around without saying a word, like a Black Iron Camp's Wind Slasher, his sharp killing intent caused Imperial Uncle Wang to be stunned on the spot

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The Barbarian envoy's smile was constantly twisting and morphing in Chang Geng's eyes, with an unspeakable demonic aura. It was the same expression as Hu Ge Er's when she was cursing him before dying. It deposited the bitterness of Eighteen Tribes who fought against heaven and earth, against people and for life.

Chang Geng stared closely at the silver cup in the hands of the Third Prince. His whole body seemed to be shackled by a thousand weights. However, in the eyes of outsiders, he was silent for only a moment.

Not long after, Chang Geng raised his hand in front of the eyes of the crowd. His thin lips were almost bloodless, he gracefully and calmly took a glass from a nearby servant.

Anyone with eyes could see that *Yan Wang* had just come out of illness. His hand and cheeks lacked blood. The finger holding the cup trembled slightly. He lowered his eyes and touched the silver cup of the prince lightly, saying coldly, "Third Prince, help yourself. I have taken medicine recently and cannot drink alcohol. When the Eighteen Tribes will bring this year's tribute, you and I will have the opportunity to drink together."

The Third Prince stared at him through the double pupils. Chang Geng touched his lips with the wine in his glass then put the silver cup aside, walking past the Barbarian envoy without looking sideways.

In other people's eyes, maybe His Highness *Yan Wang* was only

indifferent towards the enemy envoy, but Gu Yun saw from his ghostly pale face the violent and repressive impatience.

There truly was something abnormal about that Third Prince after all. Gu Yun's heart sank and turned to Shen Yi to make a signal. The latter immediately understood and quietly went out of the hall. Gu Yun got up and pushed aside the people blocking the way. As he walked towards Chang Geng, he said in a loud voice, "Your Highness, please come and have a rest."

Before he could get close, his sharp nose that was different from ordinary people's detected a very subtle odor of blood, and his heart was in a state of confusion when he recalled Miss Chen's vague line about blood.

At that moment, the Barbarian envoy was seemingly unable to read the situation and took a step forward to say, "I still remember that year when our goddess strayed to a foreign land, I didn't expect that one day I would get to see her bloodline, it must be a blessing by god."

Xu Ling coldly answered, "*Yan Wang* is the true royalty of our Great Liang. It would be inappropriate for you to say so."

The Barbarian envoy stared into Chang Geng's eyes intensely, as if wanting to see a little bit of clue from his pupils. But the more he looked, the more shocked he felt.

The reason why it was so difficult to refine the Bone of Impurity was that besides being cruel, it also required every element to be aligned. The host must have a strong temperament, so as to leave a long fermentation time for the blood of the evil god. He must not lose control too early. Otherwise, the mental development of the host would remain at the level of a moronic child for the rest of his life.

The Third Prince was one such example of a failure. This innocent child had a twin brother, both died together due to his father's hatred. Failing to survive the first attack of the Bone of Impurity, he had been destroyed and could only serve as a 'sacrifice' to evil gods. In contrast, *Yan Wang* in front of them was the perfect product. Even now, he still maintained his sanity, and even in front

of the sacrifice, he had not revealed an opening, how strong could his will be?

The evil spirit of the Bone of Impurity originated from devouring. When it was near another weak and incomplete Bone of Impurity, it aroused its instinct and would lose its mind. Therefore, the latter was also called a 'sacrifice'. At this time, if someone nearby guided him properly, controlled his mind when the Bone of Impurity was distracted, then supplemented him with medicines, the evil god would be able to follow one's orders until he collapsed completely.

Perhaps, even Xiu Niang herself didn't realize that the evil god she abandoned halfway through could be this powerful. Unfortunately, these years, the evil god was taken away by the people in the Central Plains, not only did they fail to exert the true power of the evil god, but it also became a sharp weapon against the Eighteen Tribes.

"At Yanhui Town, my king had seen Your Highness once, but at that time, he thought that Your Highness was a dirty child birthed by Hu Ge Er, he was rude to Your Highness. During this peace talks, he had ordered me to bring his apologies." The Barbarian envoy's lips curved up slightly and silently hid the secret keywords that evoked the Bone of Impurity in his questioning, "I wonder if Hu Ge Er has ever spoken to His Highness about the Eighteen Tribes?"

"Hu Ge Er... spoken," These four words of a nonsensical question set off a storm in Chang Geng's ear that nobody knew of. Before his eyes, the tall and rough Barbarian envoy merged with the gorgeous and demonic Hu Ge Er. The curse that the woman exhausted on her deathbed exploded like thunder in his ear, with an unspeakable peculiar scent coming from the Third Prince and plunged into his lungs — a little fishy, a little bitter. It spared no effort to pull Chang Geng's nerves and aroused his bloodthirsty impulse.

The door of memory which he had deliberately closed was suddenly knocked open, and the fragmented memories fiercely drowned him down.

Hu Ge Er's nightmare-like beautiful face, the hill filled with bandit corpses, the first fire in memory, the stench of blood on his

face, the endless abuse and beating... the old scars under his gorgeous court attire came alive, the blood-sucking leeches drilled into his skin and flesh, but his mortal body seemed to be unable to withstand the enormous power of the evil god. Chang Geng's chest and limbs were cut like knives. The sharp pain was the symptom of the Bone of Impurity's attack.

What's worse was that the Barbarian envoy's words aroused thousands of waves, which was totally seemingly speaking unintentionally for an intended listener.

Wang Guo immediately added oil into the fire and said, "Is it inappropriate for you to mention Hu Ge Er here? Although Xiu Jun Zhu had a great achievement in raising His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*, it was also true that she provoked the relationship between the two sides at that time, which almost led to war nine years ago."

As soon as the words came out, the cowards following Imperial Uncle Wang did not know what the situation was, and the civil officers who simply hated the barbarians immediately jumped out to dance along.

Wang Guo smile and said shamelessly, "Besides, I also heard there is nothing good about that Xiu Jun Zhu, she conspired to harm the Black Iron Camp. After it failed, she persuaded the Royal Consort who was pregnant to escape. Not knowing who she had gotten intimate with, if this old man remembered correctly, that year, there was even a rumor spread by a doctor that Xiu Jun Zhu was pregnant before marriage. Someone like this is not worthy of being our court's Jun Zhu and your tribes' goddess."

Even if someone were any dumber, they could also hear the hidden meaning in his words. Seeing that Wang Guo was courageous enough to point the sword at *Yan Wang*, the people who danced along just now all silenced, waiting for the follow-up.

Looking at *Yan Wang*, no one could tell whether he was ill or what. cold sweat rolled down from his forehead, it seemed that he had no strength to stand.

Fang Qin frowned and realized the problem on the spot: before

he knew it, Wang Guo had colluded with the Barbarian!

At this time, Fang Qin had no time to rejoice in *Yan Wang*'s misfortune, he was very uncomfortable — internal struggle was internal struggle. It was normal for people on the same side to fight for power and influence. Whether the winner takes all or they fight to their last breath, these were all internal affairs. But at this moment where the border had not been taken back and the country was at a loss, how could he drag outsiders into this?

If this was exposed — no, there was no need for it to come to light at all, even if Wang Guo was successful in proving how *Yan Wang* had mixed up royal blood, what would others think afterward? No one would think that the Fang family was innocent. He had been clearly in the same party as Wang Guo, but the old doctor was still waiting to be judged, the one who leaked the secret was kept in Fang household, there was no way for him to rid himself of this relationship!

Fang Qin broke out in a cold sweat. Wang Guo was not only using him, but he also dragged him into being a national traitor who colluded with the enemy!

He thought he was no worse than anyone else in terms of intelligence, but looking at *Yan Wang*, even though he was still young, he already had Jiang Chong as a strong right hand man, Xu Ling, the defender of justice, half of Ling Shu Institute, and even the Northern Camp who had fought side by side with him. Even the important figures in the army, such as the Marquis of Order and the governor of the Southwest, they all shared very close personal relations with him. But what about Fang Qin himself?

All around him was the likes of Wang Guo and Lu Chang. If it was not poisonous snakes, then it was villains. Not enough success but failure was plenty.

For a moment, Fang Qin felt a cold exhaustion in his heart. He truly learned what was called fate.

Was it impossible for manpower to resist the tide of fate?

The Barbarian envoy heard Wang Guo fishing in troubled water and laughed with contempt. He saw the color of *Yan Wang*'s pupils deepening. He knew that they would completely turn into double pupils before long. Then *Yan Wang* would fall into an illusion. He would not hear a single voice from the outside world. Only special secret words and key sentences could enter his ear — that was the moment he would achieve the true evil god.

The Barbarian envoy stretched out his hands as if to help Chang Geng: "Why, Your Highness does not feel comfor—"

Before the word 'comfortable' could be said, someone shouted, "You dare!"

The envoy's pupils shrank and a strong wind blew past his ears. The cold air almost penetrated his pore. In a moment, the envoy's hairs all stood up, but he could not respond at all. His neck felt cold, a sword was placed at his throat.

Gu Yun was holding a sword drawn from the waist of the guard, holding *Yan Wang* in his arms with one hand in full view of the public. Chang Geng grunted and leaned on him as if he collapsed. However, the double pupils the envoy anticipated did not appear. Chang Geng's mind was clearly clear. He whispered along with Gu Yun's voice: "Barbarians... Voodoo..."

Xu Ling exclaimed, "*Yan Wang*, what's the matter?"

A line of blood ran down the sleeve of Chang Geng's court attire, it only took a moment for his sleeve to be soaked.

All the court guards drew their swords in unison.

Wang Guo did not anticipate this situation, but after a short surprise, he still refused to give up all his efforts: "Marshal... we...we can talk about it. What are you drawing your weapon for... what happened to His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*? Call for a doctor, where's the doctor?"

Gu Yun turned his head around without saying a word, like a Black Iron Camp's Wind Slasher, his sharp killing intent caused

Imperial Uncle Wang to be stunned on the spot, letting out an 'Ah' then falling flat onto the ground.

As soon as the word 'doctor' was said, Fang Qin's eyes twitched violently, he could not sit still any longer. He knew that he must clean himself of his relationship with Wang Guo instantly, finding every possible method to push all the blame onto this goddamn old man's head, otherwise he would have to bear this humiliation for thousands of generations.

On one hand, Fang Qin ordered his underlings to kill the old doctor who was bought by Wang Guo at the fastest speed. On the other, he stood up calmly and shouted, "The Barbarians' guts are so large that they dare to act wildly in this court. It is clear that they hide their evil intentions, capture them!"

Unfortunately... apart from the internal guards, most of the soldiers were members of the Imperial Army and the Northern Camp. The newly formed Imperial Army and the Northern Camp could not afford to follow the command of a civil officer such as him. They all stood still in place waiting for Gu Yun's order.

Fang Qin was choked for a moment, but there was not much time for him to take back his dignity right now. He quickly returned to his senses and said, "Marshal Gu, I think what happened here today was very strange. You see, the servants should know that the Emperor had already left, why would they invite *Yan Wang* into the palace at this time? Even if he was invited, they must directly take His Highness to see the Emperor, why did they take him to the palace banquet? Let's first take these mobs away for trial, report it to the Emperor, then send someone to investigate carefully. We still don't know if there might be barbarian's spy mixed in all of this...What do you think? How about you bring *Yan Wang* to rest first, call a doctor..."

Gu Yun coldly interrupted his self-conscious chattering "No need to trouble yourself."

Fang Qin had never touched such a hard nail since he was born from his mother's womb. He momentarily forgot his words.

At this time, a guard dressed in the Northern Camp uniform came in hurriedly: "Marshal, we have surrounded the post station and kept the barbarian envoys under control."

Fang Qin was very frightened. Was Gu Yun going to declare war?

"Quickly report to the Emperor," Gu Yun ordered. "Besides, the palace doctors would not understand the barbarian's trickery. Invite Doctor Chen."

With Gu Yun keeping watch, even if the sky falls, they would only become busy but not disorderly. Chen Qing Xu and Emperor Long An were notified and came running at the fastest speed. Li Feng quickly looked over Chang Geng's situation. Without waiting for Gu Yun's orders, Fang Qin immediately went forward and explained everything from start to end along with his own speculations.

Emperor Long An was furious, all the palace attendants were detained in an instant, only Chen Qing Xu was allowed to enter to see *Yan Wang*, her medicine disciple was kept behind to identify the servant.

With the interrogation going on this side, Gu Yun was too lazy to see them bite each other for longer, staying by Chang Geng's side the whole time. Just now, his hand was stained full of blood. Even the bead bracelet given by the emperor dyed in red, his face was even worse than that of the injured one.

"It's alright. This time it was me who made myself bleed," Chang Geng looked at him and said, "I know my limits..."

"Limit my ass!" Gu Yun shouted at him in a low voice. "You really have to come and see what a barbarian looks like, don't you? I really..."

Chen Qing Xu made salt water for Chang Geng without anyone's

help and said, "Marshal Gu can rest assured, Wu Er Gu's body is different from ordinary people. This little injury would not be able to affect him. What on earth did Your Highness encounter that you must bleed like this?"

Chang Geng slightly closed his eyes for a moment. His gaze seemed clearer than usual. If the blood in Gu Yun's hand hadn't been wiped off, he would have thought that he was only pretending.

"I was tricked into entering the palace." In order to prevent eavesdropping, Chang Geng used sign language, "Even though the Eighteen Tribes may not be well-intentioned, I think that whether they really want to talk peace or falsely suspend their troops, the present time when our army is on standby and fully ready is not a good opportunity for them to play tricks. I did not expect that the Barbarian envoys dare to make a move on me boldly and publicly... moreover, with Fang Qin's cautious personality, he generally would not want to easily bear a crime of colluding with the enemy."

Gu Yun angrily said: "Generally?"

Chen Qing Xu quickly avoided Gu Yun's anger and asked, "Your Highness, can you elaborate?"

Chang Geng cautiously looked at Gu Yun and described the abnormalities of the Third Prince and the special scent he was able to catch. Chen Qing Xu stopped the bleeding for him quickly while paying attention to his gestures, her eyebrows wrinkled slowly.

"It's not necessarily Fang Qin who brought me here," Chang Geng said. "He's not going to be as foolish as to let himself be exploited by the Barbarians. It's very likely that the purpose of his eagerness just now was to prove he had nothing to do with this... but the motives of the envoy of the Eighteen Tribes deserve further study."

Gu Yun felt uncomfortable whenever he looked at him. He simply turned his head towards the window — out of sight, out of mind — one hand inadvertently wandered on the scabbard hanging at his waist, the fierce expression on his face had yet to fade.

He had already thought of this even without Chang Geng saying

more. The one who had bribed the servants was most likely Wang Guo who jumped up and down just now. He always regarded Wang Guo as the dog of the former emperor and did not bother himself with a dog. Now, it seemed that some people really thought he had a good temper!

Chang Geng reached out a cold hand and held the back of his hand, saying pitifully, "Zi Xi, I feel terrible. Look at me."

...This time, Chen Qing Xu was the one who did not look to give herself peace of mind.

Gu Yun's heart tightened from aching, unable to vent it, he wished he could immediately don his armor and set out to behead Jia Lai Ying Huo. After a long silence, he reluctantly suppressed his anger and said, "Maybe they wanted to assassinate the Emperor at first. When they arrived in the capital, they found that the capital was more strict than they had imagined, so they wanted to make their move on you. Otherwise, they came especially for the purpose of the Bone of Impurity. Barbarians must have the means to control the Bone of Impurity. When the Bone of Impurity is unleashed, the manpower is infinite and can exceed one's limit. The palace guards would hesitate to attack you. If they use you as a shield, the guards may not be able to stop it. There is only one reason I can think of for them to waste so much effort, that is, the envoy is provoking a war."

"If Jia Lai wanted to fight, he can simply mobilize his army. It was not necessary to trouble themselves for provocation," Chang Geng said. "General Cai's news may not be entirely baseless. There must be something wrong with the internal affairs of the Eighteen Tribes after all."

"What happened to the Eighteen Tribes is not of concern at the moment," Gu Yun interrupted him. "You also heard the words said by Wang Guo. He is on his last resort, there's no telling what he would do next. You might as well think about how to deal with it first."

Chapter 105: Retired

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The new policies were going to cause a stream of blood, and there would inevitably always be sacrifices in the face of upheavals.

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Chang Geng was silent for a while, his expression quite gloomy. He rubbed Gu Yun's finger joints back and forth absentmindedly, then sighed, "In this matter, there is nothing I can do. A person cannot prove their own origin."

Let alone he had never recognized his identity since he was young, even after he already became *Yan Wang* who had the power to overwhelm the world.

Chang Geng thought he could support the world, but he could not tell who his father and mother were — and now, as he already had Gu Yun, he no longer wished to find out his origins and backgrounds.

Unfortunately, even if he did not want to pursue it, it did not mean that the others would let him go.

Chen Qing Xu stopped his bleeding, wrapped Chang Geng's wound carefully and prescribed a tranquilizing medicine for him. She did not interrupt, nor expressed any emotion. Suddenly, an unspeakable grief and indignation sprang up in her heart.

Because of the Bone of Impurity, Chen Qing Xu was against handing the Lin Yuan wooden emblem to *Yan Wang*. Unfortunately, it was useless for her to oppose it alone. So for a long time, she had done her best to look after Chang Geng, and at the same time, take all his actions into account.

From the restoration of the capital to now, *Yan Wang* had slowly gathered the court with a thousand holes step by step. He travelled

all four sides, even fell into the rebellion mobs, almost losing his life there. He did not hesitate to touch the interests that no one else dared to touch. For this reason, he alone endured the whole court's open measures and covert tricks.

All these merits that could last for a thousand years, could they all be erased with just a few sentences about his unknown origins?

Even if he truly was not the son of the former emperor, then the Feng Huo ticket, the Canal Office, and even the one hundred thousand refugees living and working in peace and contentment in Jiangbei — were they all non-existent?

Chen Qing Xu had spent years running around the pugilist world, she was not naive. She knew the truth well, but occasionally there would still be such a moment in which she would shiver by how cold human hearts could be.

"By the way, Miss Chen." Chang Geng's voice drew her attention back.

Chen Qing Xu blinked: "What is it?"

Chang Geng: "If the Emperor asks, I'm afraid I'll have to bother you to cover it up for me."

Chen Qing Xu busily restrained her mind and nodded.

Gu Yun pinched his nose and stood up: "Alright, you two discuss it - just now you angered me to the point of being delirious. I really can't stay here for a long time, I should go and have a look at that side."

Chang Geng let go of his hand reluctantly and looked back at Gu Yun. As soon as he caught Gu Yun's eyes, he seized the opportunity and gave him a brilliant and pleasant smile without hesitation.

Gu Yun did not buy it at first. He said expressionlessly, "What are you smiling about?"

Chang Geng did not retract his smile, but continued to cast it on him. If he had a tail, it would probably have become bald from his

wagging. After a while, Gu Yun finally could not keep a straight face and helplessly reached out and patted his forehead, laughing and scolding, "Shameless."

Only then did he depart, leaving behind *Yan Wang* with his face full of spring aura and Miss Chen with her face pale green.

The Barbarians captured by the Northern Camp were temporarily distributed to the capital, separated and detained in prisons and awaited trial separately. In the midst of everything, a servant wanted to sneak out of the palace during the chaos and was captured by the patrolling Imperial Army. Chen Qing Xu's medicine disciple easily identified him as the man who deceived *Yan Wang* into the palace feast by falsely delivering the Imperial Decree.

The servant was only a minor character running errands. Not waiting to be questioned, he was already frightened by the scene in front of him and collapsed. He shouted, "Your...Your Majesty be my witness, the Masters be my witness, this servant did not falsely deliver the Imperial Decree, I did pass on Your Majesty's oral decree exactly word for word, it is *Yan Wang* who wished to enter the palace to see you..."

Before the words were finished, Jiang Chong waved his hand to let Doctor Chen's medicine disciple in. Although he was young, the little medicine disciple already bore the characteristics of Chen's family. Even when seeing all these grand characters, he was not in a panic at all. He also had the ability of remembering what he had heard, he repeated the conversation between the servant and *Yan Wang* without fail.

Everyone standing here were elites, how could they not understand?

Before Li Feng had time to get angry, Fang Qin had taken the lead in questioning the servant with an irrepressible rage. "Who had directed you to say it?"

The servant, who was a little quick-witted, immediately evaded

the crucial point and replied: "It's Imperial Uncle Wang! Imperial Uncle Wang often instructs us servants on how to serve the ruler, Imperial Uncle said...said that at times like this, His Majesty had inquired about *Yan Wang*, he should be intending to summon him into the palace, that I should be smart and change the words..."

Li Feng turned the ring on his finger and sneered, "I really don't know what I mean anymore."

Wang Guo knelt down with a thump. The moment he couldn't find the old doctor, he knew that he was probably already tossed out by Fang Qin. Fang Qin's face was merciful but his heart was cruel. Feelings and morality generally did not mean anything to him. He should have known better — at first, that Fang and Lu Chang were also incredibly close, didn't he directly sell him out, stabbing him in the back?

The servant shouted out his grievances and was dragged aside and had his mouth blocked after a few shouts. Fang Qin said, "Your Majesty, Lord Wang is the Imperial Uncle of our court. Your subject doesn't believe that he can do such a thing as communicating with foreign countries. I also ask Your Majesty to make a clear observation and must return the uncle's innocence."

Wang Guo: "..."

Uncle Wang's words of grievance were blocked by Fang Qin's words. He originally intended to shout for discrimination of injustice. He wanted to gamble that the Emperor still had affection for his uncle, or did not want to kill an old minister from the last dynasty and open his net to let him go.

If they were to make a big deal out of this, it was the big crime of falsely preaching the imperial edict and disrespecting the Emperor. But if the Emperor himself did not want to investigate it, it could be passed off as Uncle Wang being senile and confused, mishearing the decree plus meddling in and creating a misunderstanding.

But Fang Qin was too cruel. When he opened his mouth like this, Li Feng would not be able to protect Wang Guo even if he wanted to do so. That was to admit that his uncle really had a problem. If Wang

Guo was truly clean, he would welcome a thorough investigation. The problem was, he was completely dirty.

Would the Barbarians cover for him? Would the gifts sent to him cover for him? Would the traitorous eunuchs cover for him?

Wang Guo's heart was crossed at the moment. As it had already come to this, except stirring it up even further, he could not think of any other solution.

"This old subject's crime is worth a thousand deaths," Wang Guo said. "At that time, I truly was eager to see *Yan Wang*, thus I have distorted Your Majesty's meaning."

Li Feng narrowed his eyes slightly. "I don't know when *Yan Wang* had become a rare treasure that was difficult to seek. Normally, you all see each other in court everyday, you have never been close to him. He only took a two-day vacation but Imperial Uncle already missed him so much?"

Wang Guo had nothing left to lose, his guts also grew bigger, touching the ground with his head, his cheeks were tense: "Your Majesty, please listen to me. This is a long story. There is something else inside. When I visited Master Fang's house a few days ago, I was drunk and lost my way in the garden, I accidentally saw a man who appeared quite familiar at that time. Then I remembered that I had seen him before in his early years. Even Your Majesty was still young at that time. He was the most popular doctor in the Imperial Physicians Department. He had a very good relationship with the former emperor and the concubine of the Northern Man. Later, he was implicated in the disappearance of the concubine and fled in fear."

Fang Qin gave a sneer in his heart, but on the outside he said with fear, "What does Uncle Wang mean? Is it to say that I harbored a criminal in my household? Your Majesty, that is absurd!"

Li Feng looked at them coldly.

Wang Guo turned a deaf ear and continued, "I was only surprised at that time. Only after a few conversations did I know that the old

doctor had deliberately turned to Lord Fang due to his son's lawsuit."

Fang Qin: "Nonsense, how can I bend the law for personal gain!"

Wang Guo sneered and said, "Of course, Master Fang is naturally immovable, but if the old doctor exchanged the secret of Xiu Jun Zhu fleeing the palace while pregnant at that time, then I won't be so sure! This old subject knows the agility of Master Fang. At this time, the old doctor and his family must have already been dealt with, and there is no proof left — but Your Majesty, you all know that Xiu Jun Zhu colluded with Jia Lai Ying Huo in Yanhui Town and intruded into our border, some generals even experienced it personally. I may not be able to know the truth, but the Barbarians do. You can question them, then you will know whether what I said is true or false!"

It was almost bluntly stated that there was a problem with *Yan Wang*'s lineage, Li Feng took a slow breath.

Fang Qin said, "Is this old man Wang Guo mad? He would rather drag people down onto the water with him even at the cost of his own life!"

He cried out, "The Barbarians are full of tricks. They only wish Great Liang would never be peaceful. Can Your Majesty believe their absurd words? On the other hand, Imperial Uncle you really have an affair with barbarians in private!"

Wang Guo also brought out everything he has. He knocked his head down on the ground with sounds as if there were firecrackers flying to the sky, accompanied by the exploding sounds in the streets and alleys of the capital. He must be able to scare away a Nian* by this sound alone.

**A type of beast in legend that attack people at the end of the year,*
its weakness is the color red, loud noises and fire,
hence the traditions of lighting firecrackers on New Year.

"My loyalty has the heaven and earth as my witnesses, but the royal blood can not be mixed up," Wang Guo shouted. "I have my doubts and wasn't able to bear it for even a moment, thus I have to

resort to this lowly trick to let His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* go to the palace..."

"In order to get the evidence from the Barbarians that His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* was not the former emperor's own?" Fang Qin interrupted him, "It seems that Lord Wang is still very concerned about the country then! Your majesty, if His Royal Highness is a traitor who was planted in the palace by Barbarians to confuse the blood of the royal family, then the one that the Marquis of Order brought back from Yanhui Town by the order of the former emperor was also a false prince. You might as well call on General Gu and General Shen to ask for the truth, to see what these two famous generals of our court are scheming!"

Fang Qin seemed to have calculated it. As soon as he finished, outside, an attendant came to report that the Marquis had arrived.

Li Feng's face was as silent as water: "Invite him."

Gu Yun just heard Fang Qin's words outside the hall and came in with no politeness. He knelt down and went straight to the topic: "Your Majesty, Your subject and other officials were ordered by the former emperor to search for the Fourth Prince. All his features, appearance, age, relics and so on were endorsed by the former emperor. Only when they were accepted by him did we bring His Highness back, the man was also recognized by the former emperor himself."

"And I also remembered Your Majesty had told me that when he was young, His Highness *Yan Wang* had lived a difficult life and suffered abuse from his adoptive mother. That Barbarian woman must have not treated him with any sincerity, but only due to the reluctance to give up her sister's bloodline did she raise him. Even fierce tigers did not eat their young, if His Highness *Yan Wang* did come from her womb, could you tell me what kind of mother in the world would treat her own flesh and blood like this?"

Gu Yun could slap a face when he opened his mouth, Fang Qin smiled as if his facial muscles was pulled.

After Gu Yun finished his words in one breath, he turned to Wang

Guo and said, "There's another thing I want to ask Master Wang, what advantage would there be for me to mix up the royal blood? Allow me to say a few words that are difficult to hear - the Black Iron Camp has stayed in the Northwest for so many years, if I truly have any relation with the Barbarians, the northwest gate would have been broken a hundred and eighty thousand times - on the other hand, Imperial Uncle, you are always concerned about other people, but have you cleansed yourself off of the suspicion of colluding with the Barbarian woman to murder a loyal subject twenty years ago yet?"

Wang Guo really was afraid of Gu Yun, his fear was also mixed with guilt. He was originally a coward. It was due to being on his last leg fighting for his life that he could hold on for a while. At this moment, when he saw Gu Yun, let alone being stubborn, he could not even speak coherently, cold sweat came down like rain.

Gu Yun lowered himself to say one sentence to Wang Guo, as if he had exhausted his meager amount of patience, he no longer looked at him and went straight to the front to say: "Your Majesty, the Northern Barbarians are too arrogant, Your subject has been in the capital for half a year, the rust on my Wind Slasher is two fingers deep, there is no need to hide any longer, I wish to go to the Northern Frontier!"

Gu Yun repeatedly considered this matter on the way here. At this time, the Northern Barbarian envoy played tricks, combined with the rumors that General Cai had heard from the report, it was very likely that Jia Lai's side were fighting internally. He must immediately go to confirm this matter in Northern frontier, If the Northern Barbarians' political situation changed, it would be a great opportunity for them to charge in. There was nothing much in the north, but Ziliujin mines were abundant. If they could maintain war through war, maybe it was not consumption, but a support.

Li Feng frowned. In his opinion, Gu Yun's request was too hasty. He was in a dilemma.

On one hand, it was also the fall of half of the country. But for the nobles, the feeling between 'fleeing and transferring the capital' and 'an area a distance away being occupied by foreigners' were different. The latter seemed less urgent. After all, the bones of the

desolate villages in which 'all the tears were in the dust' did not grow on their bodies of silk and satin.

Now, the treasury had slowly gathered some real gold and silver, a large number of refugees have settled down, livelihoods had stabilized. Li Feng did not really want to go to war at this time.

On the other hand, although Li Feng's ambition had been worn down recently, his character still remained. If he would find out that the Barbarians truly came to his door to slap his face, he would not be able to swallow this anger.

He did not immediately answer Gu Yun, but waved his hand: "Uncle should get up first, the matter of mobilizing troops should not be recklessly decided, let's discuss it after the trial - Men, took away Wang Guo's official attire, detain him for trial, Dali Temple will deal with it, and that rampant servant, take him away as well."

After that, Li Feng did not give Gu Yun a chance to speak. He stood up and said, "I will go visit A Min."

Yan Wang appeared to be very normal when dealing with Gu Yun, Chen Qing Xu felt that there was nothing serious with his current condition. Just as she was leaving, she saw Li Feng coming in and bowed her head in a rush.

When he broke his leg, Li Feng had already met her, he politely said, "May I trouble Doctor Chen, how is *Yan Wang*?"

Chen Qingxu quickly lied, "The Barbarians used a special witchcraft poison to control the mind. Perhaps they wanted to take His Highness as their hostage for their escape. Fortunately, His Highness responded in time, cutting himself and released the poison, he's alright."

Li Feng didn't understand much about other things, but frowned slightly. He seemed to unintentionally say to Chang Geng, "What did you use to cut? You're too hard on yourself."

These words sounded like a concern about Chang Geng's injury, but in fact, he was questioning him as to why he carried a blade.

Chang Geng pretended to be 'sick and weak' and slowly knelt down holding the head of the bed. "When I received Royal Brother's oral decree, I was at Miss Chen's place. I like playing around with herbs in private. At that time, I was helping her to arrange the medicines at hand. When the palace people urged me, I had brought along her silver knife in a hurry... It was only an expedient measure."

As he spoke, he took a knife with the length of a finger from the tray next to him, it was basically a knife for cutting medicinal materials, not even as sharp as a dining knife. It cannot be considered as a weapon at all.

It could be seen that *Yan Wang* was very cruel to himself at that time. With just one cut, the knife was already deformed.

The hidden calculations in this exchange revoked many emotions in Chen Qing Xu, she requested to be excused, leaving only Li Feng and Chang Geng in the room.

Li Feng couldn't help looking carefully at Chang Geng, his appearance was good, but not the type with plenty of riches and blessings.

He had deep, affectionate eyes and a thin, heartless pair of lips. As he just shed blood, his cheeks were pale and slightly sick. Looking at it closely, *Yan Wang*'s facial features seemed to bear a slight resemblance to the Barbarian concubine in those days. His straight nose resembled the former emperor's, but when mixed together, he seemed to resemble neither of them, it was the appearance of someone with a short and lonesome lifespan.

Li Feng quietly averted his eyes and said to Chang Geng, "There are some rumors outside. Don't take it to heart and focus on your recovery. Wang Guo, that old thing has become more and more cocky and arrogant these years from receiving favors. I will make sure he gave you a proper explanation."

When he said 'Don't take it to heart', Chang Geng knew Li Feng

had taken it to heart, he took the initiative and said, "They suspect that I am not from the bloodline of the former emperor?"

Li Feng used Gu Yun's words and laughed casually: "You thought too much. You were accepted by the emperor himself. Who would dare to oppose?"

Chang Geng thought for a moment and said, "No one can explain such a thing. In this case, in order to avoid suspicion, please allow me to temporarily retire as the leader of the Grand Council?"

Li Feng squinted, but did not answer immediately.

Chang Geng smiled bitterly and said, "When the new policies come into being, I may not be able to make much progress in my stay but instead only garner further hatred. Royal Brother, please show sympathy."

This remark touched Li Feng's heart subtly.

The weight in the Emperor's hands was nothing more than the word 'balance'. The rebellion of Lu and Yang's two parties and the rebellion of the Imperial Army forced him to suppress Great Liang's old noble families by himself. At the same time, the new officials rushed to the front in no time using the power of large businessmen, becoming more and more powerful.

Li Feng could tolerate the growth of seedlings and was happy to see them stand up against the family forces whose eyes were above the top, but he never wanted the seedlings to grow into tall trees and topple the roof. This force had been growing too fast—

Even Imperial Uncle could not stay out of this affair. This time, it was Wang Guo, then who would it be next time? Was it to ask the Emperor to dispose of all the nobles in the court? At that time, what name would this nation bear?

The new policies were going to cause a stream of blood, and there would inevitably always be sacrifices in the face of upheavals.

Li Feng looked at Chang Geng and said, "Very well, you've been in a lot of trouble recently. Taking a rest at the right time is

something one should do."

Chapter 106: The North

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Chen Qing Xu stopped talking nonsense, turned around and left. She departed from the capital the next day.

—

Overnight, the wind and clouds suddenly changed.

Imperial Uncle Wang who was favored by two generations was imprisoned, many of the palace's servants who had connections with him were dragged out one by one for investigation, within the nine layers of the palace, the people's hearts were anxious, the investigation brought out loads of other matters like dragging a radish out of the dirt, the old case of the Black Iron Camp was inevitably overturned. When the tree falls, the monkeys will scatter. The entire court busily cleaned themselves of their relations with the Wang family, for fear of being implicated.

The Barbarian envoy who maliciously created disturbances were secretly detained, being patrolled by the Northern Camp in shifts.

But even Fang Qin did not anticipate the final result of the incident——

Yan Wang, the nail in his eyes had resigned from his official position and Emperor Long An even gave his permission.

Fang Qin lived to this age, for the first time, he knew what was called 'unpredictable fate'. When he used hundreds of schemes wanting to deal with *Yan Wang*, the man was perfectly alright, while he himself almost fell into the mud. This time, he had no intention of interfering, anxious to get rid of the relationship with Wang Guo and did not hesitate to stand on the side of his political opponents... Turns out, as God would have it, it did not go as he hoped!

No wonder the ancients said, "An Emperor's mind, gods and demons could not predict".

There was a heavy snowfall that night. The plum blossoms in the Marquis' Manor were covered with a layer of transparent frost. The colours were condensed in it, appearing very beautiful.

The return carriage stopped at the door, on the open gate, the steam lamp continued to cast a small bright light faithfully even after being covered by the snow. After a long sigh, the iron puppet guarding the door turned around, the steam quietly drifted away, and the door of the manor opened wide.

Gu Yun jumped out of the car and waved at Huo Dan. He lifted the curtain and said, "Give me your hand."

Chang Geng's wound caused by the silver dagger, although appeared horrifying, in fact, it did not affect the muscles and bones. Even if Chen Qing Xu left him be, with Wu Er Gu's body, it would scab quickly. He had soon stopped feeling shit.

But in the face of Gu Yun, he would look for an excuse even if there was nothing.

Chang Geng pretended to hold onto Gu Yun's arm and got out of the carriage. He rushed up as if he had no bones, grabbed Gu Yun's shoulder and arm with great strength that could not be shaken off. He did not know what kind of injury could make one so powerful so quickly.

Gu Yun knew that he was pretending, he also knew that he truly was wronged and did not have the heart to criticize. He only put his hand on Chang Geng's back and gave it a gentle pat. He drew over the cloak and wrapped it around him, walking inside the gate.

Their entry brought along the cold wind inside and woke up the birds hanging by the window in a cage.

The bird was deep in a dream, being blown awake by the cold wind, it cursed, "Damn it, cold as hell... Ga... Quack... good luck and happiness to you! Blooming flowers and a full moon! Profits pouring in from all sides! May all your wishes come true!"

Gu Yun: "..."

He and the God Bird looked at each other for a long time. Finally, the bird raised one wing shamefully and covered its face. It seemed to know that the image of its current flattering figure was disgraceful and had no face to see anyone anymore.

Chang Geng grinned, it seemed that General Gu was already astonished by his ability.

"Your face is red with the cold," Gu Yun touched Chang Geng's chin. "Taking a knife plus losing your official position yet you can still be this happy? Change your clothes quickly."

"Feeling lighter without the position." Chang Geng gave a meaningful laugh, turned around and changed to dry clothes. He sat by the window, grabbed the bird and stroked its hair in his hand. The bird was trembling in fear at his touch, "Hey, Zi Xi, if I truly was born by Hu Ge Er, then who was the father?"

Gu Yun: "Don't think nonsense."

Chang Geng laughed as if nothing had happened. "That man must not be a barbarian. Otherwise, he would have gone with her at that time, but he must have had a very close relationship with the Barbarian women. He probably participated in plotting the concubine's escape as well, then took over the forces of the Barbarians in the capital and the Imperial Palace... It was not until the capital was besieged that he was revealed."

The man he referred to was Master Liao Chi, just like Shen Yi's first speculation.

The man he shot with his own hands.

Gu Yun did not pay much attention and commented, "You're referring to Dongying people? Dongying people can't be as tall as you are, but if you really grow into the ugly appearance of the crow-mouthed old monk in the future, I will not want you anymore."

Chang Geng smiled in silence.

Gu Yun: "I'm going to ask someone to boil some ginger soup. Don't catch a cold."

Chang Geng leaped to his feet, stuffed the bird back into the cage, pulled back a large black cloth and covered it, then he said with bad intention, "Dispersing the cold doesn't necessarily mean drinking that thing. Let me!"

(T/N: icymi, this is a sex scene)

At this time, the Barbarian envoy who had just been questioned was imprisoned in the innermost layer of the Celestial Prison.

The Barbarian envoy, who was pushed into the dark cell, turned his head once and looked at Shen Yi on his horse's back, his gaze caused Shen Yi's heart to tighten.

The Barbarian envoy gave him a strange laugh and hummed in a tune of a folk song: "The cleanest spirit on the prairie, even the wind wanted to kiss her skirt..."

They lived in the grassland for a long time, each of them possessed a clear and strong voice. The man's voice was slightly low, echoing in the snow and wind, there was a kind of a wolf's moving and tragic sorrow at the end of the road that lingered, the singing continued to resonate even as the man was gone.

Shen Yi frowned and listened for a moment. He could sense the changes coming with the years.

Ziliujin burned quietly in several Heavy Armor gold boxes patrolling near the dungeon. From the outside, a little purple halo could be seen. Steam floated in the ice and snow. In a twinkling of an eye, it dispersed. Grassland, horses, primitive swords, spears, and arrows all faded together, solidifying in the dark of the iron puppet in Heavy Armor.

Shen Yi suddenly had a feeling, it was as if an era had come to an end before his eyes.

However, he was only emotional for a short time and soon came back to his senses — if Gu Yun's speculation was correct, then there might have been separation within the Eighteen Tribes, such opportunity for battle must not be missed, and the North was likely to be engaged in a war immediately.

Just as Shen Yi circled outside the prison and was about to leave, suddenly a white shadow flashed by from afar, making one feel somewhat dizzy. If it weren't for Shen Yi's keen intuition that he had honed over the years on the battlefield, he would hardly have noticed it.

Shen Yi made a gesture towards the several unaware guards nearby and and took the lead in carrying his Wind Slasher into the prison. The more he walked, the more frightened he was. There was not even a footprint on the ground. The empty prison was quiet, while the two jail guards at the gates — one sitting, one standing — remained motionless. On closer examination, they had fainted silently.

Suddenly, there was a breeze behind Shen Yi's head. Instinctively, he reached out and pulled out the Wind Slasher from behind him and swung it back — but it was empty.

There was a tinkle in his ear, the Wind Slasher touched something very light. Shen Yi rushed forward without looking back. He leaped up into the corner, leveraged his feet on the wall, turned over and grabbed the clothing of the intruder. He pulled it down as he went. The veil on the person's face was pulled down unexpectedly, it was Chen Qing Xu.

Shen Yi: "..."

He had no idea when he had landed. His mouth was agape and he almost sprained his foot.

In the next moment, there was a rush of footsteps on one side. The guards of the Northern Camp had followed him in. Shen Yi came back to his senses and shook his head at Chen Qing Xu quickly, pushed her into the corner where there was no light, then gathered up the Wind Slasher as if nothing had happened and turned around.

Guard: "General Shen, what's wrong?"

Shen Yi said lightly, "It's nothing. I have only mistaken. The Barbarian was full of trickery, tell the brothers to be on the alert."

Without any doubt, the guards quickly formed into several groups and patrolled other places.

Shen Yi stood calmly for a moment, breathed deeply, his heart was about to jump out.

For a long time, he quietly wiped away the second patch of cold sweat in his hand and turned to Chen Qing Xu's hiding place: "Why is Miss Chen here?"

Chen Qing Xu came to see the Barbarian envoy. She did not want to let go of any clues about the Bone of Impurity no matter how small. She already informed Chang Geng before she came. Chang Geng wanted to ask for assistance in the army, but Chen Qing Xu thought for a moment that she didn't intend to rob the prisoner, she only wanted to go into the prison at night to walk around, hence it was not a big problem. With the matter of the Bone of Impurity, the fewer people knew, the better.

She did not expect to get caught, and by the hands of someone she knew at that. At the moment, she put her hands together and said in embarrassment. "Thank you for your mercy. I came to the prison to confirm a few things with the Barbarian envoy — General Shen can take a look at this."

As she said this, she took out a note by Chang Geng from her bosom with Gu Yun's private seal on it. This was Chang Geng using Gu Yun's power to open a back door for her. Chen Qing Xu did not intended to accept it at first. At this time, she secretly felt fortunate that she did, it was good there was such a thing, otherwise, she would not be able to clearly explain herself.

The letter was kept in her bosom, it was still warm. When Shen Yi took it, his hands trembled as he read it dreamfully. Each word was like smoke passing by his eyes, every ink drop could enter his burnt brain.

Shen Yi stayed in the same narrow room with Chen Qing Xu, but did not dare to lift his head to look at the other.

When Chen Qing Xu saw that he had not spoken for a long time, she reminded him, "It has the private seal of Marquis Gu on it."

Shen Yi woke up from his dream: "Ah... Oh, yes, then you should be careful, uh... Please come in. "

Chen Qing Xu went in the prison with relief, after taking a few steps, seeing that Shen Yi did not follow after, she said: "If the general does not feel reassured, you can come together."

Shen Yi nodded his head, saving his words like gold: "Mm, pardon me."

After that, he followed Chen Qing Xu five steps apart in silence, even a breath was not let out, he was more quiet than the inanimate iron puppet. The prison was pitch dark, Chen Qing Xu could not see that Shen Yi was blushing into a monkey's buttocks. She was still amazed. Didn't they all say that things of the same kind gathered together? How could there be such a formal and old-school person beside the Marquis?

Relatively speechless, the two walked all the way to the Barbarian envoy's single room. Shen Yi finally opened his mouth and said, "This man's name is Chi Ku Yo, the trusted confidant of Jia Lai Ying Huo, the Wolf King."

Chen Qing Xu was shocked by his sudden voice like a corpse that had come back to life, and, her fingertips flashed with silver, she almost took out the murder weapon. Of course, Shen Yi saw it, he shut up with regret and dared not say a word.

At this time, it was the enemy who rescued General Shen, who was about to drill down the wall of the prison. Chi Ku Yo in the single room heard his introduction and continue his words in a leisurely way: "Everyone else said that I was a traitor beside the Wolf King, but the general here has sharp eyes."

When Shen Yi met him, his lips became more fluent: "A traitor?

So the rumor that your tribe's Second Prince usurped the throne is true?"

Chi Ku Yo shook his head. At this stage, there was no point in hiding it, he said frankly, "The Second Prince is only a child, not yet at the age of having ambition, but the Eighteen Tribes of the Wolf King only have three princes. The First Prince was already locked up by them, the Third Prince... haha, he was only an idiot who needs to be assisted in everything from eating to dressing and moving around, only the Second Prince can reluctantly be a puppet for them."

Shen Yi keenly captured the word ‘them’. As long as his mind was not on Miss Chen, it was very sharp. He immediately realized — the Northern Barbarians, named ‘Eighteen Tribes Alliance’, were not one organization. If one wanted to be the king of wolves, besides keeping everyone warm and full, he also had to had sharp teeth to bite the others.

Shen Yi narrowed his eyes and tried to fish for information, "What's the matter? Can the Wolf King tolerate this?"

Chi Ku Yo sneered: "A great hero will eventually grew old, otherwise, how can the wild dog come out?"

Shen Yi heard that Jia Lai Ying Huo was either injured or sick, it seemed that he had lost control of the Eighteen Tribes.

He lowered the Wind Slasher, the point of the blade through the sheath was at the right length to stand on the ground. The pupil of Chi Ku Yo shrank slightly. The Black Iron Camp would always remained a shadow over the heads of the Eighteen Tribes.

Shen Yi, holding his elegant tone of Hanlin, said, "Your Wolf King's temperament is very extreme. In recent years, the people have not had a good life. Now, there are massive force of soldiers in the northwest, the warriors in the Wolf King's hands may not have the heart to go out to war. Forgive me for being foolish, but why must you mix into the group of envoys at all cost to destroy the peace talk? Didn't it also involve the Third Prince, an innocent child?"

Chi Ku Yo looked at him calmly. "The general is right. I'm afraid

those in the Eighteen Tribes Alliance also think the same way, but it is not my king's wish. I have sworn to Chang Sheng Tian that I will be loyal to my king, even if I bear the name of a traitor, I will fulfill my king's wishes for him."

Shen Yi: "Please elaborate."

"Beasts must bear the appearance of beasts. If the Eighteen Tribes fall into the hands of those who wag their tails and beg for mercy and are trained by Great Liang to be a dog digging Ziliujin, it would be better for them to die on this path of battle for powerm" Chi Ku Yo looked at Shen Yi. "General of the black crow, I ask you, do you want to live a miserable life, or die in the fierce flame?"

This Chi Ku Yo talked like a bastard, Chen Qing Xu thought that Shen Yi would disdain it, but unexpectedly, as he heard the question, he actually gave a proper reply, "I would rather die in the flame myself, but I also know the truth that even an ant would strive to live. It's natural for those who join the army to protect those who prefer to live even more, I am not the only one. I do not think that there is anything miserable about a quiet life of fishing and farming. If the people of your tribes really live miserably, it is also the fault of the person in charge for carrying a sharp weapon."

After Shen Yi finished, feeling that he had obtained some information, he stepped back and politely made a gesture to Chen Qing Xu: "*Yan Wang* asked this lady to ask you a few questions, the two of us should talk less nonsense."

When Chi Ku Yo heard the word '*Yan Wang*', his expression changed for a moment, it seemed to be a mix of something strange and respect. Before Chen Qing Xu opened her mouth, he took the lead and said, "Are you coming because of the Bone of Impurity?"

When Chen Qing Xu came, Chang Geng asked her to give Chi Ku Yo a sentence, "Give up the secret of barbarian witchcraft, I will give you what you want." Before, Chen Qing Xu did not understand what it meant. At this time, as she listened to the dialogue between Chi Ku Yo and General Shen, she had somewhat understood it and proceed to deliver this sentence to him.

After hearing this, Chi Ku Yo had a rare expression of pondering on his face, he then answered properly: "As for the Bone of Impurity, I only know how to evoke and control it. As for how to refine it, only the leader and goddesses know about it. It is a secret that will not be passed on to the others. Forgive me, but I will not be able to promise anything."

Chen Qing Xu: "What about the cure?"

Chi Ku Yo listened said with amazement, "What did you say? A cure?"

He sighed and curled his lips. "Woman of the Central Plains, Bone of Impurity is not of the same kind of poison of you Central Plain people. Not dying even after eating, revived again after drinking the antidote. After the refinement, Wu Er Gu is Wu Er Gu. He has been reborn and is no longer human. If you want to beat him back to his original shape, it is like putting a dog that had been born back to his mother's womb, to let it be born again as a rabbit, that is not possible."

Chen Qing Xu was not so easily fooled: "The so-called ‘rebirth and transformation’ is only enough to deceive laymen. If the envoy want to be sincere, you'd better not trick me with such nonsense."

Chi Ku Yo eyes turned slightly, he said with a sly smile: "Unfortunately, I am a ‘layman’ — the last goddess that was Hu Ge Er has been dead for nearly ten years. Before her death, she had passed on the forbidden art to my king. The Third Prince was the Bone of Impurity forged by his own hands... although limited by the host's qualifications, this Bone of Impurity is not complete, but if you want the secret of the Bone of Impurity, you can go to him — as long as your black crow can kill the jailed Wolf King's wild dogs."

This Barbarian envoy was full of trickery and provocation, but for better or worse, it had confirmed one thing — if the Third Prince was truly a Bone of Impurity, then Jia Lai Ying Huo must possess the complete forbidden art of the goddess, this was a direction.

Chen Qing Xu stopped talking nonsense, turned around and left. She departed from the capital the next day.

Shen Yi was about to turn crazy. He wished he could grow wings and fly to the northern front line immediately. He troubled Gu Yun every day, Gu Yun was not able to stand his harassment, running to the palace three times in just two days.

Finally, on the third day of January, Li Feng followed his wish and ordered Gu Yun to go to the northern frontline secretly, act cautiously, explore the situation of the Eighteen tribes, and avoid rushing into action.

Yan Wang was not able to follow them to the front line. He sent them off all the way to the Northern Camp, a sense of unreasonable anxiety suddenly arose in his heart.

He turned his head and looked in the direction of the imperial palaces and whispered to the coachman, "Go to Wangnan Tower."

Chapter 107: Troubles

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Infinite rivers and mountains, all were gathered in a stroke of ink.

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The first night Gu Yun left the capital, as he put on the liuli glass, the clip suddenly broke. Then, the glass rolled down the bridge of his nose, knocked on one side of the black iron shoulder armor, then cracked.

For a general about to depart on an expedition, the damage of his belongings was an ominous sign. The guard was frightened, afraid that Gu Yun would not favor such things.

Gu Yun rubbed his nose and said, "Gee, did I already mastered Golden-Bell Armor and Iron-Cloth Shirt without being taught?"

**two techniques from the 72 techniques of Shaolin, which both refers to making oneself invulnerable to attacks*

The guard said, "This is ‘many years of peace*’ Marshal. I'll bring you another one."

**The word break(碎) is pronounced the same as the word "year(岁)", when breaking something, people would use this and say "many years of peace" instead*

The guard took care of his daily routines, knowing that he must have a spare liuli glass in his luggage, in the process of searching, he accidentally saw a large envelope placed together with Gu Yun's stack of clothes and belongings. It was thick to the touch, sealed with wax, the words *‘To Marshal Gu’* was written on it.

The Marquis of Order with his hands full daily certainly did not have the hobby of writing letters to himself. This thing mixed in his clothes had the aura of ‘skin-to-skin closeness’, which naturally

brought an ambiguous feeling of intimacy.

Who could be the one who packed Gu Yun's clothes?

Apart from the white-bearded old servants of the Marquis' Manor, perhaps it could only be a significant other.

The seal was still intact, Gu Yun himself probably hasn't found the envelope yet. The little guard had a bright idea. He gleefully took both the backup glass and the envelope to Gu Yun altogether, speaking in a sly tone, "Marshal, there's an important letter in your clothes, you should look at it quickly, it would not be good if you forget."

Gu Yun put on the glass, looked at the familiar handwriting on the envelope with a subtle look. As he raised his head, he instantly caught the sly look on the guard's face, he laughed and scolded: "What are you looking at, get out."

The guard laughed, no longer probing, he made a face and ran away.

The envelope in hand was quite weighty, resembling a thick book when picked up. If it was a love letter, it would probably have to be written starting from the years when His Royal Highness still wore diapers. Gu Yun opened the envelope while guessing: *"Housing deed? Land title? Feng Huo ticket? Silver? Or the secret of immortality?"*

However, when he opened the contents, he was almost shocked by what was inside.

It was a thick stack of drawings, with all soft and durable sea grain paper. Sea grain papers do not get affected by fire and water, but some places were still yellowing and the edges were curved, it seemed to have been drawn throughout many days, the ink on the paper was different in depth, perhaps the original owner had commented on it many times and was not just finished in a flash.

The top one was a large picture of the whole nation of Great Liang, which could cover the floor when spread out, three rivers and five lakes, from Manjing to Ouyue...it's all on the paper. On the top of

the map, there were also countless small letters in Kai style to mark where he wanted to open mountains, where to set up factories, where there were plenty of fish and rice in green mountains and waters, which ports were suitable for expansion and facing the four seas, where could the Sea Dragons truly travel, where could a route specially made for *Ziliujin* could be opened.

Which official roads need to be repaired, where to use Giant Kites and the improved Large Eagle to connect with each other, there were railings painted on the paper resembling an artery running all over the country - this was the railing of the Western's steam train Chang Geng once talked about, long like dragons and snakes, could travel thousands of miles a day.

Under the map, there was another drawing of the design of the steam train, accompanied by the professional annotations of Master Feng Han, with the calculation of transportation capacity along with funding and rations written by Du Wan Quan beside it.

In addition, the thick sea grain paper also had the explanation of the reformed official system in Great Liang's future, ‘Grand Council’ and ‘Canal Office’ have been achieved, but it also included many positions Gu Yun had never heard of before, hierarchical, highly efficient.

There were plenty of examples as such —

If Gu Yun were to see these things five years ago, he might have thought it was the imagination of a common folk storyteller. Now, although many things have not yet been completed, it was all as vivid as real, whether it had been achieved or have yet to, it was no longer a fantasy.

Under these drawings that resembled a fantasy, there was also a painting, the strokes were not exquisite, it could be seen that the painter was not good at this subject, but the artistic conception was straightforward. With a few strokes, it outlined a child playing with firecrackers on the roadside, behind him there was a fruit tree, no one knew what had grown, but there was a large bunch of bright colors in the branches, there was no telling if they were flowers or fruit — and in the distance, mountains and rivers layered on the

edge, it appeared both joyful and peaceful.

There was neither inscription nor poem on the painting, only the words ‘heaven and earth at peace’ were written, resembled a note.

Infinite rivers and mountains, all were gathered in a stroke of ink.

Gu Yun's heart was very hot, he unconsciously reached out his hand and lightly pressed his chest. Only then did he find that he had been holding his breath without himself knowing and could not help but laugh silently while pressing his forehead. Xiao Chang Geng, who would act spoiled, was pitiful and endearing, but *Yan Wang* who sketched and designed the nation, was the one that moved his heart.

In the blink of an eye, Gu Yun and Shen Yi had arrived at the front line of the Northern Frontier. Meanwhile, they secretly transferred a part of the Black Iron Camp's three factions to join behind the North City Defense Army. The former commander of the North City Defense Army had died when the barbarians invaded. The crucial frontier area cannot lack a veteran general, hence General Cai had been temporarily taking over this position.

Cai Fen truly was old, and he was getting older year by year. The last time Gu Yun joined forces with him to suppress bandits, he felt that his back was not so bent and his hands were not trembling this much.

In fact, how could it not? How many years could a man have in his life? How much blood can be spilled at will and not become cold? When one was in their twenty or thirty years old, they ventured on the battlefields, full of merit and fame. When they grew old and tired, even though the spirit cast in iron was still there, one could only start to waste their effort, isn't it the same as a person's beauty that could not last?

The battlefield in the Northern Frontier had been in a deadlock, but unlike Jiangnan separated by Changjiang, although the barbarians dare not make any big movement, there were many daily frictions. There would be a medium to small-scale battle between the Central Plains and Barbarians every three to five days. The whole

army would have to be on standby throughout the night to patrol and dared not relax. Fortunately, Cai Fen's youngest pair of twins would soon be 20 years old. Most of his children were grown adults. The Cai's family army had taken shape, for better or worse, they could share his burden and not let the old general exhaust himself to death.

Now, along the way, nine out of ten houses in the villages and towns in the vicinity of the Northern Frontier were empty. This area was originally not flourishing, plus suffering from repeated war disasters and bandits, if they did not give up their houses, they would have to give up their lives.

"It had only calmed down a bit after the Barbarian envoy entered the capital for peace talk." Cai Fen coughed a few times then said, "The scouts reported that the barbarians are gathering *Ziliujin* for tribute as per the condition of the peace treaty. If that's the case, I think that the peace talks are not exactly insincere. Is Marshal coming for their *Ziliujin* tribute?"

The news of the Man envoy's imprisonment was blocked. Gu Yun's group traveled too fast, even if there were leaks, it had not yet arrived at the frontline. Cai Fen was still unaware of the incident of the peace talks.

Gu Yun and Shen Yi looked at each other. As the commander of the four sides, he was aware of everything inside, but for the sake of insurance, he asked in detail about various situations in the Eighteen Tribes.

"That's right," Cai Fen said. "This year, the North has suffered a severe wind disaster. Many cattle and sheep have died. There is not enough meat. The meager amount planted and raised in the local area is not enough to eat, let alone support the war. After Marshal defeated the Western Regions, you had basically cut off the supply and transportation routes of the barbarians. I heard that the Westerners in Jiangnan are not doing well themselves either, even if the routes were not cut, they don't necessarily have the power to take care of the barbarians."

Shen Yi said, "I learned from another line that the Second Prince who usurped the throne did not seem to have done so intentionally,

but that there was something wrong within their Eighteen Tribe Alliances."

Cai Fen thought about it and nodded, "General Shen's statement is reasonable. In fact, just before winter this year, some barbarians had secretly dug Ziliujin to trade for food. Looking at the quantity, it was not necessarily done by regular civilians. At that time, I felt that the Eighteen Tribes might be dispersed. As expected, after a short time, the Second Prince imprisoned his father and brother."

Shen Yi looked at Gu Yun, who nodded slightly to him.

Cai Fen sensed something unusual and asked, "Marshal, what's the matter?"

Shen Yi gave a brief summary of what happened and the arrest of the envoy in the capital.

Cai Fen was horrified, then shook his head in a solemn manner after a moment: "Marshal, General Shen, even if there were internal disagreements among the Eighteen Tribes, whether Jia Lai Ying Huo wanted to bring outsiders to calm the insiders, or simply wanted to burn everything altogether, why bother sending people into the capital city? Just coming to the Northern Frontier station to set off a fire, that will be more effective. Does he have no one else to deploy except for a single guard?"

Shen Yi shook his head. "That's convenient, but the people currently in power in the Heavenly Wolf Tribe are likely to push one or two people out as a scapegoat, it would not solve anything."

The Eighteen Tribes have been unified under the Wolf King's banner for hundreds of years. The Wolf King family has a high prestige in the hearts of the tribespeople. It was a bit like the imperial family of the Central Plains. Those who have ambitions dared not touch Jia Lai Ying Huo, they have made every effort to push the Second Prince out as a puppet. And if it was like the plan Chi Ku Yo had said, which triggered the Bone of Impurity in the palace and controlled *Yan Wang*, Great Liang would have to go straight to the hinterland of the Eighteen Tribes and ask the Wolf King to surrender the antidote. Jia Lai wanted to force the traitors to either fight Great

Liang or hand the Wolf King out and bear the humiliation.

Cai Fen frowned: "Jia Lai Ying Huo is a mad dog, but he may not be mad to that extent. If he can still endure, he would. What does he have to depend on if he initiates a war now? The starving people in the Eighteen Tribes?"

Shen Yi was unable to answer this question.

Gu Yun went to the edge of the sand table and stood for a moment with his hands behind his back: "He actually had something to depend on — if the foreigners in Jiangnan want us to shift our strategic focus to the north."

Shen Yi and Cai Fen were both surprised.

Gu Yun stretched out his hand and swept across the sand table: "The supply routes were blocked, rations and resources were exhausted, if it continues, there is only death, either surrender, or fight till the end — unless the North and South both join forces to take this risk, not letting Great Liang have any room to rest. A sudden and unexpected penetration into the hinterland, launching a surprise attack, forcibly re-opening the supply routes, that way, there will be a way out. If I were to be Jia Lai Ying Huo, perhaps I would also be willing to take such a risk, if the foreigners are willing to cooperate."

Cai Fen: "Marshal means…"

Shen Yi suddenly came to a realization, "Westerners are occupying the fertile soil of Jiangnan, continuously using wars to feed more wars, scraping the ground three feet under to rob the civilians' hard work and also capture a large number of laborers to dig the mines for resources to transport back to their country in exchange for domestic support. They also have the intention of resting and recuperate."

"Recently, General Zhong constantly adjusted the deployment of the naval force in Jiangbei, Ling Shu Institute had also transferred a new batch of Dragons to the Jiangbei frontline, these actions had made the foreigners uneasy, thus the Pope had deceived Jia Lai into using his full force, pushing the Eighteen Tribes out as a shield. Once

our strategic focus shifted northward, we would have no time to look south. At that time, when the Pope sends a message for peace talks, the court will be forced to accept it, the south could then rightfully belong to them!"

Cai Fen was stunned, "Marshal, what should we do now?"

Gu Yun laughed: "We wait, the foreigners are not the only ones who know misdirection."

Three days later, the secretly assembled Black Iron Camp appeared on the front line of the Northern Frontier, the ambiguous atmosphere at the front line due to the peace talk suddenly become tense.

The Eighteen Tribes had a deep fear towards the Black Iron Camp. On the same day, unable to sit still, they had sent someone over at top speed to inquire about it. Gu Yun ordered his men to bind the messenger and spread the news about the rebellion of the Man envoy, Chi Ku Yo. At the same time, using the Black Tiger emblem to order Jiangbei to lock down the water, stop the daily patrolling routine and withdraw a large force at the south distributed by the Ling Shu Institute, creating the illusion that the two sides were discussing a truce.

The barbarians also had their own eyes on the south side. After a few days, the news along Liangjiang had arrived.

The Eighteen Tribes exploded, General Cai's spies reported back that there were two internal conflicts in the Eighteen Tribes alliance within a day and Jia Lai Ying Huo's tent was enclosed tightly, no one was allowed to approach.

The next day, the barbarians hastily gathered a part of Ziliujin and sent it to the front line of the Northern frontier along with two heads. Gu Yun collected the goods but threw the messenger out. At the same time, the Black Iron Camp was pushed forward ten miles, obviously unwilling to stop.

The enemy's civil conflict was on the verge of eruption.

Shen Yi was very anxious, barging straight into Gu Yun's tent. "What about Miss Chen's side?"

Gu Yun was discussing with He Rong Hui and Cai Fen. As he heard these words, he looked up leisurely and asked, "Which Miss Chen?"

Of course, General Gu would share this kind of gossip with the others. He Rong Hui and Cai Fen obviously already knew everything. He Rong Hui only smiled silently while General Cai shook his head helplessly.

Shen Yi could not take so much into account at this moment and said frankly, "Stop pretending! I'm afraid Miss Chen had already arrived in the Eighteen Tribes. They're in such a mess…"

Before he finished, a person wearing a veiled hat came in from the outside.

Shen Yi: "..."

Chen Qing Xu brushed aside her veil and asked, "Was General Shen referring to me?"

Linyuan Pavilion had its own wooden bird communication, Chen Qing Xu had received the news on the road and directly rushed to the garrison in the Northern Frontier.

The generals burst out laughing, He Rong Hui laughed until his face reddened. He went and put his arm around Shen Yi's shoulder, already prepared a belly full of jokes.

At that moment, a Black Eagle suddenly fell down outside, the dust flew high and almost knocked over half of the marshal tent. if it wasn't for the cushion of the protective gear in the Eagle's armor, this fall would have caused someone's life.

Black Eagles were well-trained and seldom had such accidents. The generals were quiet for a moment then laughed aloud, asking which recruit of the scouting team he belonged to. This time, He Rong Hui turned from red to purple, he let Shen Yi go and was about to give a good scolding.

Before waiting for him to open his mouth, the Black Eagle who fell to the ground raised his dirty face. He Rong Hui was stunned on the spot — this was a veteran in the three scouting teams and was once registered with him.

"Marshal," the Black Eagle scout ignored the laughing and teasing of others, took out an urgent letter from his bosom and said quickly, "An urgent document from the Grand Council!"

There were three kinds of urgent letters sent by the Grand Council to garrisons all over the country. There was a ribbon at the tail of the carrying tube — yellow for the emperor's order, green for the copied document when something major had happened to the court, black for the military affairs, and red for the emergency military affairs. For example, when foreign enemies invaded, Gu Yun's Feng Huo Order issued to all places was marked with the red ribbon.

The Black Eagle was holding a red marked letter in his hands, making people's scalp itch. Gu Yun stood up violently and his heart suddenly emptied. It seemed that his steady heartbeat suddenly met a threshold then rose and fell randomly. His mouth dried up for no reason. He Rong Hui did not dare to delay, He quickly took over the letter tube and brought it up.

There was no telling how many words the letter had to cause Gu Yun to look at it for a long time. Everyone had stretched their necks. For a while, even the idea of the capital being surrounded again had manifested, only then did he slowly put the letter down.

He Rong Hui was quick-tempered, he immediately asked, "Marshal, isn't the red label meant urgency? What the hell is going on?”

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Map of the Song Dynasty
from https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/6a2sat/map_of_song_dynasty_china_in_1120_2000_2057oc

SPL timeline is loosely inspired from the events of Song Dynasty, thus we've attached a map of the Central Plains during this period for everyone to have a geographical image of some events. The phrase "Manjing to Ouyue" from this chapter refers to the westernmost and easternmost state of Central Plains.

Other notes:

• -bei refers to North, -nan refers to South, -dong refers to East, and -xi refers to West, e.g. Jiangnandong = Eastern Jiangnan, etc.

• Taiyuan in the north is where Miss Chen's family manor is located

• Chang Geng and Gu Yun's reunion in Sichuan is located in the Zizhou-Lizhoi-Kuizhou area of this map.

Chapter 108: Jiangbei

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Without warning, he coughed out a mouthful of blood.

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In the early of February second, ninth year of Long An, on the day of the Longtaitou Festival, Jiangbei Camp sent an urgent letter to the Grand Council. While patrolling the camp, General Zhong Chan fell down from his horseback and was unconscious.

The military doctors of the whole Jiangbei Camp gathered in his tent, it seemed that he will not be able to make it.

After urgent confirmation, the Grand Council immediately decided to send a red-label urgent letter to Gu Yun, but the letter had not yet been sent, the second urgent letter from Jiangbei Camp arrived.

General Zhong had passed away.

He died in the frontier, but he did not die in battle. Instead, he died like a thousand other ordinary old people in the world — painless, without illness or disease.

This kind of death makes people feel empty, because there were no enemies to hate, no hatred to vent, and it was not a bedridden illness with no one to take care of him either.

Suddenly, a person disappeared, making one feel it was very unreal.

Gu Yun held the red label letter and looked at it for an incense time, then slowly let out a breath from his chaotic heart. Only then did he regain his mind — it was not a dream.

The silence in the Marshal tent lasted for a moment, then not knowing who started it, everyone started saying 'Condolences' one after another.

Shen Yi comforted, "Marshal, the old general is seventy-six years old, it is already very rare to find. This could also be considered as a happy funeral*, you shouldn't let it weigh down your heart."

**喜丧, *xǐ sāng, a Chinese custom on funerals for somebody who lived to a ripe old age and lived a good life.*

"I know," Gu Yun sat silently for a while and waved his hand. "I know, it's all right, but the situation in Jiangbei is delicate. At this time, the general in charge had an accident, and Chong Ze had just taken over as the governor of Liangjiang, it would be difficult for him to manage everything. I'm afraid there will be troubles. Hmm... Let me think..."

However, although he said ‘let me think’, his heart was completely blank, as if all thoughts had been cut off and he could not feel them.

Shen Yi looked at his indescribable painless face and murmured, "Marshal, since the day it was formed, the Jiangbei Navy was trained by the joint effort of both General Zhong and Master Yao, I'm afraid someone else will not be able to handle the navy."

With him taking the lead, Gu Yun finally had a reaction. He unhurriedly replied: "Yao Chong Ze and Old Zhong's deputy general will be able to deal with it for the time being, but it seemed that Master Yao will have to serve as the governor of Liangjiang until the end. Yang Rong Gui is only out of action for less than half a year, it had taken a lot of effort to stabilize again…"

The latter part, it was inconvenient for Gu Yun to say aloud in front of the generals. The situation in Jiangbei was not easy to stabilize. The refugees, businessmen, and local officials had just returned to their places. The factories in many areas had just been built, and the people's houses had not even warmed up yet.

But *Yan Wang* just resigned recently. Who would take over the Jiangbei Canal Office?

Was there going to be a bloody struggle for power once again, or all previous efforts would vanish in the fire?

Some people were not born in the right time, some people did not die at the right time, General Zhong's death was not at the right time.

Gu Yun said, "I have to go and take a look at that side, over here..."

Cai Fen hurriedly said, "General He and General Shen are both here. Marshal can rest assured that there will be no trouble in the Northern Frontier."

Gu Yun nodded and asked his guards to pack up while he quickly spread out his pen and paper and wrote reports for the court.

First, he had to send someone to deliver letters, and to hand over the military affairs, busy until the lights were all lit up, but Gu Yun still pulled Shen Yi over to instruct: "Jia Lai Ying Huo this man, most of his time as a young man, he was ferocious, and a small part of the time, he was a mad dog. This time the Eighteen Tribes are in disorder, I'm afraid if it wasn't well taken care of, there will be consequences, do you understand?"

Shen Yi nodded: "The barbarians will cease to exist from now on."

From the days heaven and earth were created, how many lineages have been annihilated in the vast expanse of time, due to natural disasters, or wars, or the assimilation of blood in the long intermarriage... some have crumbled, some were blown by the wind, some were earth shattering, then quietly disappeared.

Shen Yi finally understood the feelings in Chi Ku Yo's song in the prison that day, the barbarians were moving towards the end — no matter how they struggle, they were still pushed forward by an invisible hand.

Today was the barbarian, but if the capital city was taken over that year, maybe the one at the end of their road would become Great Liang.

"It's good that you understand," Gu Yun said. "The kind of lunatic

who would make their own children into Bone of Impurity like Jia Lai Ying Huo and Hu Ge Er, no one knows what they can do at their last moment. General Cai is already old in age, He Rong Hui is too hot headed, Ji Ping, this side may mainly depend on you."

Gu Yun was also a talkative fellow in his free time, but he was not a lengthy person in official business. For him, this was already quite long as an instruction, but he could not help himself, he truly did not feel reassured.

Shen Yi: "Leave it to me. If something happens in the Northern Frontier, I'll go see you with my head in my hand."

"What do I want your head for?" Gu Yun shook his head and laughed. "I never eat pig's head meat."

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun ran away from him at a safe distance before he could unleash his anger and pulled a Wind Slasher, placing it on his back, "I'm leaving."

"Wait, Zi Xi!" Shen Yi suddenly stopped him and said, "Take Miss Chen with you."

After the death of General Zhong, Gu Yun could still write reports, handing over his military affairs in an orderly way. He instructed the generals one by one, and even cracked a few jokes as if nothing had happened. To outsiders, this reaction seemed calm to the point of cold hearted, but Shen Yi was very worried — that year when he learned of the Black Iron Camp's incident from Jia Lai Ying Huo, he was also acting calm this way at the beginning.

"What do I do with her?" Gu Yun did not turn around, "You really think the Chen family sells miracle medicine that can revive people who have been buried?'

Before the words were finished, his shadow had disappeared as if it he was rushing to get reincarnated.

At the same time, there was no impervious wall in the world.

Although Great Liang have tried their best to keep it quiet, but when the two armies confronted each other, it was impossible to hide what happened to the opponent's commander. Just when Gu Yun received the news and rushed to Jiangbei overnight, the Jiangnan Western Army also had their lights lit bright and did not sleep through the night.

Master Ja took the medicine from the servant's hands and said, "I'll bring it to His Majesty. Go tell the others not to disturb."

The servant bowed respectfully and ran quickly.

Before he was near the door, Master Ja already heard the quarrel inside.

"No, that is too greedy," said the Pope, his voice hoarse and mixed with the occasional coughing. "I do not recommend it. You can't swallow anything bigger than your own mouth, being this greedy, sooner or later, something will happen!"

Another person replied in a voice that was oily like a reptile. "To be frank with you, Your Majesty, this is not greed, but the interest that is within reach. If I dream of eating one star at a time, then I am greedy, but on the contrary, I only want one cookie, and it happens to be at my hand..."

Master Ja frowned and knocked rudely at the door: "Excuse me, Your Majesty's medicine is here."

The man who was confronting the Pope closed his mouth, reached out and touched his beard, and shrugged rudely.

This messenger from the Holy Land has stayed in Great Liang for more than half a year for various reasons. He had no intention of leaving at all. Everyone knew that this man was sent here by the King

and noble lords of the Holy Land to manage the situation.

On the side of the Holy Land, the King could no longer wait and was eager to gather up lands and monarchical power, he only wanted the Pope to fall down. At the very beginning, the messenger had no good intention, he had tried every means to prove that this war was a complete mistake. However, gradually, with the increasing number of financial and mineral resources they managed to rob and bring back home, the noises within the country gradually became quiet.

The bottomless greed of the Holy Land was completely fired up by the richness of the mysterious eastern land. Those noblemen who wanted to see the Pope return defeated began to change their attitude. They were more active than ever before in promoting the interests of the Western Army in Great Liang, wishing they could open up their small mouth to swallow this large animal whole.

This time, they used the north to switch the strategic focus of Great Liang. When the people of the Central Plains have no time to pay attention to anything else, they would fish in troubled water, this was the plan the messenger had used all his might to push forward.

The Pope had strongly opposed to this because there was a vast northern part of the Central Plains between the two battlefields. Since there was a disconnection of the transport and communication lines in the west, the efficiency of the connection between the two sides was very low. When the Pope integrated the ambitious people in the siege of Great Liang, he had used the time lag when the information was interrupted while on its way — he knew full well that in battle, an opportunity was as fleeting as a second. What's more, Jia Lai Ying Huo in the north, in his view, has a radical and crazy side engraved in his bones, there was not enough calmness to sustain a long-term cooperation.

Unfortunately, although the Pope held the command of this army, its ownership belonged to the King and the nobles of the Holy Land. The material could be plundered from the local land, but *Ziliujin* could not — Jiangnan did not have even one drop, it must rely on domestic transportation. In general, he lacked many advantages.

Now, Gu Yun's plan led to the civil strife of the barbarians, which further aggravated the destruction of the barbarians.

Although the Pope did not want to cooperate with Jia Lai, he did not want to let the Black Iron Camp in the northwest go south either. Once Great Liang got hold of a large number of *Ziliujin* deposits from the Eighteen Tribes, the battlefield in Jiangnan would fall into a very passive situation.

In this dilemma, they received the news that the commander of Jiangbei Camp was dead and the Holy Land's envoy once again came out with his absurd schemes.

Master Ja put the medicine on the table and said respectfully: "If you notice, the Central Plains people have been sending more troops to Jiangbei, but they may not really want to fight. They also want to take a chance to catch a breath. Under such circumstances, the peace talks between our two sides can be operated. Why do we have to take a risk and gamble with our warriors' lives?"

The messenger laughed and turned to the Pope: "Your Majesty, your right-hand assistant is very talented, but in my opinion, he is still too young — both sides sat down at a negotiating table to sign a contract, which seems to fulfill their respective signing procedures, but the content is very different. The profits gap between the advantageous side and the disadvantageous side is as far as the distance from the Holy Land to the Central Plains. Do I need to stress this common sense again and again? The commander of Jiangbei Navy has died. Isn't this a chance given to us by God? If we really miss it because of our cowardice, I have a hunch that we will regret it in the future!"

Master Ja did not change his expression, "You are right. The commander of Jiangbei Navy is dead, but Gu Yun is still alive. He will come!"

The messenger looked at him gloomily. 'Then we can launch a surprise attack on them when they transfer military commands and turn him into a dead man. Your Majesty, didn't you say Gu Yun had used us to convince the Northern Heavenly Wolf tribes that our alliance with them has been broken? Why don't we prove to the

Heavenly Wolf tribes with practical actions? How do you know that old allies in the past won't surprise us?"

Master Ja thought, "*Absurd*!"

But for a moment, he was not able to find the words to argue back and was speechless.

The Pope swallowed the medicine as if it was poison and shivered, he picked up a piece of silk cloth to wipe his mouth then sighed: "Messenger, a war of this magnitude, is impossible to fundamentally change anything because of the death of one or two people. Over the past year, the Jiangbei Navy has established a relatively complete system. Have you ever thought about what would happen if our attack can not achieve the desired effect? What will we do then?"

The smile of the messenger turned cold. "You are right. Such a war on this scale, one or two people is of no importance, then why are you gentlemen so afraid of Gu Yun in this way?"

Then, without waiting for a rebuttal, the ambassador suddenly stood up: "I admit that the possibility that you said really exists, but even if the worst happens, we at least showed a strong attitude. It is a stimulus to the northern battlefield, we still attain more benefits — Your Majesty, I must say, you are too cautious. We have absolute advantage in the battle along the river. So what if the navy of the Central Plains had been built? One year? Two years? It is still only in its infancy! If I were you, I wouldn't let the Liangjiang battlefield be silent for such a long time. I will not let the Jiangbei Army of the Central Plains people have any time to be build at all!"

Master Ja's eyes twitched, witnessing the two words ‘arrogance’ and ‘greed’ so clearly for the first time in his life.

The Pope stood up and exclaimed, "Messenger, it is very irresponsible of you to say so."

The messenger put his hands together and raised his chin: "Your Majesty, the right to dispatch *Ziliujin* of our army is in my hands, and the Holy Land has given me permission to execute orders in your

place at the most critical moment!"

Master Ja stepped forward angrily and laid his hand on the hilt of his sword at the waist: "You!"

The messenger's ferocious and sly eyes fell on him, the Pope grabbed Mr. Ja's sleeve——

After a moment of stalemate between the three, the messenger's gaze averted slightly, his lips raised in a smile, and said hypocritically, "I have never doubted Your Majesty's wisdom. Please consider my suggestion carefully. Now, if you excuse me!"

After that, he grabbed his hat, put it on his head arrogantly, and turned away.

Master Ja: "Sire, why do you hold me back? If you kill him…"

"If he was killed, the troops belonging to the king and nobility would immediately turn their face." The Pope gave him a fierce look. "Do you really think your men are as loyal to their commander as the Black Iron Camp?"

Master Ja was stunned. "What shall we do then? Do you compromise?"

The Pope remained silent for a moment: "All we can do is to pray for God's blessing--"

Blessing that the Jiangbei Navy was just as the ambassador said, still in its infancy. Blessing that Jia Lai in the northern battlefield was crazy enough to hold Great Liang people firmly in check, so that they might be able to find a good outcome on this dangerous road.

When the Jiangnan Western Army were brewing a new scheme, Gu Yun arrived at Jiangbei. The first thing he did after landing was to reinforce the defense line. The watchtower guards will change shifts

every two hours, everything will be on standby. He then calmed the mood of the army and the officers were reorganized, everyone can return to their positions. Master Yao was only a civil officer, although he can temporarily control the frontline, he did not possess the authority and efficiency of Gu Yun.

Busy from noon until the evening, Gu Yun finally had some time to drink a mouthful of water, his throat was dry enough to emit smoke, he could almost taste a bit of blood. He could not pay attention to whether it was tea or water, grabbing a bowl of cold water and drank.

This year, Jiangbei's spring arrive strangely late. Just a few days ago, there was a snow rain, everywhere was the gloomy air of bone-piercing cold. The cold water made Gu Yun cool from inside to outside, he shuddered, thinking in a daze, "*What else is about to come?"*

At this time, Yao Zhen came closer and said, "Marshal, when we sent an urgent message to the Grand Council, the court sent a letter informing that they will send someone here in the next few days. We got the news that *Yan Wang* is coming on behalf of the Emperor."

Although *Yan Wang* resigned from office, his identity and status were there, he still shared a relationship as master and disciple with General Zhong for a period of time. To show the Emperor's grace, it was also reasonable for him to take this trip on behalf of the royal family.

"Mm, he should also come and see it." Gu Yun finally remembered that he had forgotten something. "Um... Chong Ze, where is the praying hall located, take me to have a look. "

Yao Zhen took him to the praying hall.

It was even colder than other places. The coffin of Zhong Chan laid in the middle, the incense's smoke scattered all around.

Gu Yun's footsteps suddenly stopped at the entrance of the hall. These days he was too busy, running around two places in the north and the south, taking care of matters both big and small, it had

naturally separated him from the truth, only until this moment, a thought suddenly hit his chest.

He thought, "*My teacher is gone*."

Yao Zhen turned around and said, "Marshal, what's wrong?"

Gu Yun took a deep breath and shook his head. He went in and lit incense for Zhong Chan "You should go take care of your business. I'll stay here with him for a while, call me whenever you need to."

Yao Zhen whispered: "No one can escape the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Marshal please do not be so sorrowful, the Marshal tent had been cleaned up, after you are done mourning, you should go take an early rest, I'll leave people by the door, you can call them as you need."

Gu Yun nodded, there was no telling if he could hear it or not.

When the praying hall was empty, his eyes slowly fell on the face of Zhong Chan. Since it was disease-free death, General Zhong's facial features was not fierce, but it was not calm either. The face of a dead person was always ashen, the skin was wax-like, not the same as when one was alive. The spirit was gone, the body was the body, empty.

Gu Yun sat down beside the coffin with his elbow propped up. He quietly remembered the days when he was young with Zhong Chan as his teacher.

At that time, the great general of the cavalry had not yet been shrunk by age and was not all skin and bones. He was a talented and brave man, majestic and vigorous. His gaze seemed to always contain two blades, when he fixed his eyes on someone, the blade tips could be exposed.

"Little Marquis, memorizing all the strategy books does not prove that you know how to fight a battle, isn't it not the same as listening to those young masters discussing strategy on papers? If you are so complacent, I'm afraid you will not be able to even organize a group fight among the street urchins and win."

"Little Marquis, a person's ability is two things combined. One is hard work and the other is pain. Nowadays, the old Marquis and the First Princess are no longer around. You are of noble status. Nobody would dare to hurt you except the Emperor. If you want to be comfortable, want to spoil yourself, nobody can push you forward, what you want to be in the future, you must think about it carefully for yourself."

"Wealth and fame is not the end goal for a military commander's life. Since the Emperor insists on putting the bow away as there are no more birds, it is also peaceful at the moment, so let him put it away. From now on, this general will not be able to be around, the little Marquis should remember to take care of yourself."

"Mountains and rivers are bound to meet again, the two of us will reunite someday."

Changjiang River's new waves continue to push over the last, a talent of thousands generations will eventually grew old.

Gu Yun's ear gradually buzzed, his eyes could no longer see clearly, he could not help squinting under candlelight, still immersed in the old memories of the past.

A general who could live until their seventy and pass away without any illness, many people would have felt envious, it truly was a happy funeral. Gu Yun felt that he could not tell if he was sorrowful or not, it was just that his chest felt tight.

Chang Geng also came all the way here. When he arrived at Jiangbei Camp, it was already dark, not having a moment to rest, hearing that Gu Yun was at the praying hall, he dismissed all the servants and went straight to it.

The guard who stood at the gate of the praying hall knew Chang Geng. Seeing him coming from afar, he immediately went in to inform, Chang Geng did not have time to call him back.

The soldier shouted, "Marshal, His Highness *Yan Wang* had arrived."

Gu Yun did not respond, Chang Geng estimated that he was too

busy to take medicine on time, he lifted his robe to step in and said, "It's all right."

The guard carefully reached out and patted Gu Yun on the shoulder: "Marshal?"

Gu Yun was suddenly startled, in the state of being half-blind, unable to see who was coming, he stood up abruptly from his chair, there was a sudden sharp stabbing pain in his chest.

Without warning, he coughed out a mouthful of blood.

Chapter 109: Ten Years

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Now, in the wet and cold frontline of Jiangbei, those ten years have shrunk to an inch, in which he crossed over by a step.

—

The soldier was frightened out of his wits, stunned on the spot and was pushed aside by Chang Geng. Chang Geng's hair all over his body stood up, his hands and feet were colder than the winter weather in Jiangbei.

Gu Yun was just suffering from chest pain at first, after spitting out this blood, he had felt a bit better, but the coughing would not stop. The front of his clothes was stained with blood. He could not see clearly what was around him, waving his hand around, "Don't make a ruckus,... *cough*, don't... *cough*..."

Chang Geng suppressed his spirit that was on the edge of collapse and was about to pick him up when suddenly, he heard Gu Yun vaguely crying out to him: "... Chang Geng..."

He took a deep breath and leaned over to listen, "Hm?"

Gu Yun's nose was full of the scent of blood. This time, even his sense of smell was not working, it seemed only his brain was still clear as if on its last momentum, he speaks in intermittent, "Chang Geng...*Yan Wang* is coming these days. This matter is not allowed to be spread, especially him...do not let him know..."

Chang Geng's heart cracked, his eyes red, he told the guard next to him. "Call the military doctor over!"

The guard ran away.

Yao Zhen was really exhausted both mentally and physically, wanting to cry but had no tears. He simply suspected that the feng shui of

Jiangbei camp was not good. One person just fell down, another one followed, even an ancestor who could not afford to fall. At the moment, he could not help but asking Master Liao Ran who came along with Chang Geng. "Are you here to pray for Old Zhong? Praying is not urgent, you should first chant sutras to exorcise evil spirits?"

The master looked at him helplessly and gestured*, "The mute cannot recite sutras."*

Chang Geng thought that as he had followed Miss Chen to study medicine all this time, he could be considered as half a doctor. But when it came to a critical moment, he found that towards one patient, he was really helpless. As he saw the blood of this man, his mind had already been blank, the medical books he had learned seemed to have all been given back to Miss Chen, let alone doing any treatment.

All the best military doctors in Jiangbei Camp were gathered in the marshal tents that had just been cleared up before anyone could live in. Everyone who came in and out was very nervous. Chang Geng held Gu Yun in his grip without letting go, he did not feel that he was being an obstruction either, sitting aside quietly, making the military doctors tremble.

Liao Ran was standing at the door with worries, he had heard how Chang Geng was pinned into a hedgehog that year when the capital was in danger. At this time, he was really afraid Chang Geng would suffer an attack in Jiangbei Camp - there was not even one person here who could suppress him.

However, beyond his expectation, Chang Geng was very quiet from the beginning to the end. He didn't have the slightest sign of turning mad. Gu Yun's vague sentence 'do not let him know' was like a needle, pinning his soul in his body.

Chang Geng suddenly felt that he was asking too much from Gu Yun, and he was carelessly getting more and more greedy. He had never let him have a peace of mind. How did he get all those new and old wounds while he had been kept in the dark about all of them? Chang Geng could imagine many times when Gu Yun was at a place where

he could not see, wounded and sick at the same time, while still having to tell the others to block the news, not letting him know.

"Your Highness," said a military doctor cautiously, "Marshal overworking himself is half the cause of his illness, and... er... in addition, in the past year or two, he has suffered wounds on the front line, injuring his lungs and organs, the congestion has not come out. This time, although it looks dangerous, it is not necessarily a bad thing."

Chang Geng listened, silently reached out to place a hand on Gu Yun's pulse and forcefully calmed his nerves. Even after checking blindly for a moment, he still could not come to a conclusion and had to trust these military doctors' diagnoses. "Mm," he asked, "what medicine should be used, have the gentlemen concluded yet?"

The military doctor hesitated for a moment and said, "Uh... in this case, it is better not to use too much medicine, he should rest and calm the mind..."

When he finished, even he himself knew that he was speaking needless words, nervously looking at Chang Geng's hands holding Gu Yun with blue veins showing. He was afraid that Yan Wang would lash out on him, but after waiting for a long time with fear, Chang Geng did not say anything, he only sat there in a daze.

Then he politely said, "Thank you, I hope you will do your best."

Several military doctors felt frightened by his grace, filed out, and each did their utmost. Liao Ran quietly came in and stood gloomily in front of Chang Geng for a while. Finding nothing else he could do, he stretched out his hand and brushed the slightly wrinkled eyebrows of Gu Yun, silently reciting Buddha's mantras.

Chang Geng sighed, "Don't do it, Master, he disliked Buddha. Are you going to wake him up by angering him? -- Do you have wooden birds with you? Write a letter to Chen Qing Xu."

Liao Ran looked up at him.

Chang Geng said expressionlessly, "Ask her how many things she had

helped Gu Zi Xi to hide from me."

"Your Highness, are you alright?" Liao Ran signed.

Chang Geng's shoulders moved slightly. In an instant, Liao Ran felt that he almost broke down, but Chang Geng did not collapse. He looked down at Gu Yun for a while, and did a thing that frightened the master into crying -- he was holding Gu Yun's hand in spite of himself, and slowly kissed his forehead, the kiss was respectful and pious, almost feeling solemn.

Liao Ran's mouth was agape as he took in a cold breath.

Chang Geng's eyes did not leave Gu Yun, there's no telling to whom did he whisper the sentence to: "Still good, rest assured."

The Master was frightened, he thought 'non-existence is existence, existence exactly is non-existence', and took small steps to escape, leaving Chang Geng to silently keep watch on Gu Yun.

In the middle of the night, Gu Yun changed from being unconscious to falling into a deep sleep. He seemed to be trapped in a nightmare. Occasionally, he would move restlessly. Chang Geng remembered that Gu Yun could not lie still when he had a high fever that year, but it seemed that if he could feel that someone was accompanying him, he would be able to feel a little more secure, thus he had leaned on the bed and held onto him the whole time.

In the praying hall of General Zhong, the faint fire was still shining. It was a wonder if he knew about this and returned in Gu Yun's dream, and what would he say to him.

Chang Geng tightened his hands and held Gu Yun in a posture similar to protective. For the first time, he had no dependence on his little yifu, no desire for his loved one. Instead, he seemed to cherish a young and fragile child.

In those days of his unrequited feelings, Chang Geng had imagined countless times that if he had been born ten or twenty years earlier, what would be the scenario between him and Gu Yun?

Now, in the wet and cold frontline of Jiangbei, those ten years have

shrunk to an inch, in which he crossed over by a step.

Unfortunately, even if on this side, he crossed over ten years within one night, it could not stop the Westerners discreet scheme.

That night, the messenger and the Pope completed their internal struggle, and ended with a brief victory for the messenger, reaching a consensus on launching a surprise attack on the Great Liang Navy.

The plan was scheduled for this gloomy evening, but before it could come into action, suddenly, news came from the watchtower that the Jiangbei defense line of Great Liang had been tightened and the alert level had been adjusted to the most serious and critical situation.

Master Ja quickly rushed into the main ship that was already full of power and ready to go: "Your Majesty! Gu Yun came too fast. Great Liang's Navy is obviously not only in its infancy. The opponent had increased their defense, if we fight fire with fire like this, it won't benefit our economy..."

Before he had finished, the messenger came in with an unsightly expression: "No one is allowed to change my plan!"

The messenger could represent the King and the aristocrats in the presence of the Holy See and the army, he must have strong supporters behind him, a highly trusted and talented young master. He was arrogant and ambitious. A few days ago as he was bluffing, not putting Great Liang army and the commander of the Black Iron Camp in his eyes, both outward and internally, turns out, he already receive this slap to the face not long after.

Not mentioning other things, the messenger's self-esteem would not find this acceptable.

The Pope was also anxious: "Please repress your personal feelings. War is not a matter of a joke or fighting to see who is better!"

The messenger turned red and argued roughly: "No one jokes about wars, Your Majesty! If the enemy is just bluffing, what can they possibly prove? This is precisely the best time for us to attack!"

Master Ja immediately asked, "What if it wasn't a bluff?"

"There's no such possibility," said the messenger, giving him a somber look. "These fragile navies have no fighting power at all. You're just worried about taking risks-"

Master Ja: "These are illogical excuses!"

"Pay attention to your wording, sir," said the messenger coldly. Then, with a turn of his eyes, he drew a roll of parchment from his arms. "I'm not here for discussion, gentlemen. I signed the highest call order on behalf of the Holy Land half an hour ago. This is a backup copy. Please see through it carefully."

Master Ja's face was red from anger, before he could protest, the main ship 'sea monster' suddenly gave a long sigh, it seemed he had already acted without letting anyone voicing their opinions.

"Are you crazy?" Master Ja roared. Instinctively, he pulled out his sword at his waist and said, "Stop!"

The messenger showed no sign of weakness and immediately drew his shining knight saber, "It is our honor to fight to the death for the King and infinite glory! We are not on the frontline to hide in our harbor and pray!"

Master Ja: "What did you say!"

The Pope shouted: "Enough!"

The messenger made a sneer: "Why, what else does your majesty wish to instruct?"

The Pope's cheeks twitched for a moment as if his nerves were abnormal and finally compromised helplessly on the departed main ship: "If we must follow your absurd plan, at least the battlefield will be directed by my men."

The messenger could not agree more, if this expedition failed, the Pope was a ready scapegoat. He gave Master Ja a pleased look and laughed, withdrawing his saber and loudly said, "Go at full speed!"

Tonight, a line of Western Dragons under disguise dispersed in the long battle frontline of Liangjiang, quietly bypassing the Jiangbei Camp, ready to land in the glory of God.

In the Northern Frontier, thousands of miles away, the Eighteen Tribes also sent a second group of envoys to contact Great Liang.

Cao Chun Hua himself arrived in Northern Xinjiang. He and Chen Qing Xu had gone deep into the barren land in the north before, they were very familiar with the Heavenly Wolf Tribe, supporting the delicate situation in the Northern Frontier and accompanied Shen Yi to see the Man envoys outside the Black Iron Camp defense line.

Through the Qian Li Yan, it could be seen that this time, the Northern Man envoy did not come empty-handed. They pulled a convoy behind. From the appearance and rutting impression of the convoy, it seemed that it was specially designed to transport *Ziliujin*.

A twenty-five to twenty-six year old young man, surrounded by a group of messengers, seemed to be the leader of this group at first glance. However, after a closer look, they saw that the young man was pale, with obvious fear and anxiety, caught in the middle of several horses, appearing as if he was forced to be here against his will.

Shen Yi dared not take the initiative to talk to Chen Qing Xu, he had to asked Cao Chun Hua in a low voice, "Who is that man?"

Cao Chun Hua looked at it through the Qian Li Yan and said, "The second prince of Jia Lai."

"What?" Shen Yi frowned. "Are you sure, are you not mistaken?"

Cao Chun Hua threw a glamorous eye at him, pointed his fingers to Shen Yi's chest. "Ah, General Shen, Teacher Shen, I remember two things very well in my life - One is the face, the other is the tone of a person's voice. You can trust me."

When he was a child, Shen Yi also taught him how to read books. At

that time, he felt that he was a fairly normal girl. Who knew that when he grew up, as he 'recovered' his male body, the whole person turned into having this conduct. Shen Yi, as an old age scholar and an unmarried man, he really was not able to endure Cao Niang Zi's fierce provocation. At the moment, with goose bumps all over, he unconsciously moved closer to the direction of Miss Chen and dodged that finger.

"Xiao Cao." Miss Chen glared and coldly opened her mouth to warn Cao Chun Hua.

In the entirety of Lin Yuan Pavilion, he could offend anyone but could not afford to offend Doctor Chen. Cao Chun Hua immediately closed his lips and sat properly on the horse's back, feigning decency as he analyzed to Shen Yi. "General, it seems that the Eighteen Tribes really are sincere this time. To hand over the 'Wolf King' truly is a humiliating deed, perhaps they plan to push everything the envoy did in the capital onto this puppet Second Prince to ease things up."

Shen Yi tapped his finger gently on the horse's bridle: "Wait a minute, don't be too excited so soon. I always think that for the Barbarians to give in like this, it was too easy."

He had dealt with the Northern Man many times, he knew how much of a bastard they could be.

For most of these cattle raising bunch, they would not shed tears before seeing the coffin. At this time, the Black Iron Camp had only threatened a little, they had not even reached the frontline of the Man, let alone doing anything. Shen Yi always felt that logically, the Eighteen Tribes should still struggle for a while longer.

Cao Chun Hua looked at the suspected large quantities of *Ziliujin*, licked his lips and asked, "What should we do? Do we let them in?"

Shen Yi said cautiously, "All *Baihong* arrow archers, take aim. Forbid the Barbarians to approach, summon the *Ziliujin* inspectors to come and open them one by one for inspection."

Cao Chun Hua's expression changed, he looked back at Shen Yi. The two men both remembered the Trojan horse that was the Giant Kite

in Yanhui Town that day.

If it was someone else, at least a fierce tiger would not eat their young, but normal logic could not be used to deduce Jia Lai Ying Huo. He truly could commit such a thing as using his son's own life to trick the enemy into opening the gate.

At Shen Yi's command, the Black Iron Camp immediately drew up its swords and arrows. The killing intent on the northern ground greatly increased, surrounding the envoys.

The Second Prince trembled on his horse's back, seemingly about to fall off, a team of trained *Ziliujin* inspector ran out, opening the chests and checking in front of the Man envoys.

Several carts of *Ziliujin*, which made people drool, were thus exposed to Shen Yi and others.

The *Ziliujin* inspector dared not be careless. He inspected the purity of *Ziliujin* in each cart one by one, and put the characteristic pole into the sealed carriage to check the volume.

Several long poles stained with *Ziliujin* were presented to Shen Yi. The scale on them was almost full. The inspector quickly reported, "General, purity is of no problem, reaching the proper level for tribute."

Shen Yi made an 'Mm' sound, still did not put aside his doubt, then looked up at the Second Prince. On his forehead, there was an angry purple mark, appeared as if it was created by a whip. The prince's face was wet with tears and snot, opening his mouth as if wanting to cry out but could not make a sound.

Chen Qing Xu whispered, "General Shen, you see, there is a purple mark on his forehead. I have heard about it in the Eighteen Tribes. It is a witchcraft poison for extinguishing one's ability to speak. His entire body is stiff now, which is equivalent to being fixed on the horse. He would not even be able to let out a cough. In a few moments, when the purple mark darkens, he will fall to the ground and die. Even if doing an autopsy, he can only be found to have been overly frightened and died of fear and palpitations."

Without blushing or shying away, Shen Yi shouted, "Wait, stop them!"

The Eagle in the sky gave a sharp cry: "Stop!"

The horse of the Second Prince stopped suddenly, his whole body leaned forward as if his center of gravity was unstable. His hard boots hit the top corner of the nearby oil tank, making a lingering noise of an echo.

One corner of the tank is empty!

Shen Yi's pupils suddenly shrank: "Fall back!"

As he finished, a man in the group of envoys rushed to an oil tanker and was shot dead by an Eagle with quick eyes. The whole Black Iron Camp silently fell back at the fastest speed, Shen Yi pulled Chen Qing Xu's horse rein, urging it to move back.

A cluster of sparks erupted into the sky.

It turned out that there was a small teenager hiding under the tank, waving a torch in his hand, lighting a hidden lead under it then looked up at the sky and smiled.

At the next moment, the first *Ziliujin* cart exploded, the young man turned into the dust in the air.

From that point, a huge impact burst, several dozen feet of purple flame shot up to the sky, the surrounding air boiled instantly, invisible heat waves rolled in, the cold black armor of the Black Iron Camp soldier following behind were burnt red, and the golden boxes exploded like a chain reaction.

Chapter 110: Bright Sword

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This blade that had been tempered must be sharpened with the enemy's blood.

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Trapped in the infinite nightmare, Gu Yun stepped onto the void, falling in the deep darkness. His muscles suddenly tensed, his whole body twitching violently, then woke up in the dark night.

He sobered up very quickly, and in the instant he opened his eyes, his soul returned to its place. He remembered exactly where he was and the things he had yet to do.

But at that moment, Gu Yun was stunned. Someone had placed a cold cheek on his forehead. Not to mention Jiangbei Camp, even those from the Black Iron Camp would never dare to be this 'intimate' towards him. He then caught the scent of tranquilizer and saw a silhouette with his half-blind vision that had adapted to the dark.

Gu Yun's existing sweat had yet to dry, a layer of cold sweat already came out. He thought*, "Why is he here?"*

Chang Geng twisted the simple steam lamp on the camp bed, silently pulled out a towel from the nearby basin and wiped away the sweat on Gu Yun's forehead.

Gu Yun's whole body was soft, and there seemed to be an invisible wound buried under his chest's skin and flesh. He could feel a dull pain whenever he exerted a little bit of strength. He fumbled around for a while and found his *liuli* glass in a bit of panic: "I'll do it myself..."

Chang Geng bowed his head and ignored him, pushing his wrist down with just a touch.

Gu Yun nervously moistened his lips, feeling a little guilty for no

reason and thought, "Did anybody talk nonsense?"

At this time, Chang Geng had cleaned his body thoroughly, tightened his clothes, and pulled the quilt over to wrap Gu Yun tightly. Only then did he finally raised his head and made eye contact with him.

Gu Yun seized the moment and smiled at him.

Chang Geng looked at him expressionlessly.

Gu Yun weakly pulled out a hand, grabbed the back of Chang Geng's neck, gently kneaded it for two times and caressed his chin with his fingertips: "Why the long face as soon as you see me? Your yifu's beauty and love had already faded so quickly?"

"..." Chang Geng suddenly wanted to see how well he could pretend, he asked coldly, "What happened to you?"

Gu Yun narrowed his eyes slightly and read his lips. His face did not change, "A cold."

Chang Geng: "..."

He expected that Gu Yun would cover it up, but he did not expect that he was this half-hearted in his cover up.

Gu Yun wanted this matter to pass by pleasantly, he reached out and patted Chang Geng's face. "Come, let me see if you have lost weight recently."

Chang Geng slapped his hand away and said angrily, "Gu Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun immediately adjusted his tactics and frowned, bringing his military authority out of nowhere: "Who had run their mouth again? General Zhong has just passed, has Jiangbei Camp already become this lawless?"

Chang Geng took a deep breath: "In the praying hall, you..."

Gu Yun the wicked accused first and intercepted, "Which kid had guarded the praying hall? Which camp did he come from? Call Yao

Chong Ze here for me, this must be punished by military law!"

Chang Geng clenched his teeth silently.

Gu Yun shook his head like telling a true story: "Jiangbei Navy is still short in years, this kind of thing will not happen in the Black Iron Camp..."

"Really," Chang Geng said with a humorless smile, "I am that kid. What is Marshal going to do to me?"

Gu Yun: "..."

At this moment, the ever-changing and always-scheming General Gu understood what was called ‘be rendered speechless’.

Chang Geng actually had a belly of questions to ask him, but he knew that Gu Yun would not honestly confess. Unable to bear seeing this man exhausts himself trying to deal with him, his words were pressed down several times as it surfaced. As he was in turmoil, there was a sudden strange noise from outside the tent.

A soldier's voice outside the tent cried out in a hurry, "Your Highness! Your Highness *Yan Wang*!"

Chang Geng frowned and stood up, "What's wrong?"

As he finished, a sudden tremor came from the ground. Chang Geng was startled. Only when an explosive falls could such a tremor be created!

Taking another look, the Jiangbei Camp had bright lights lit, the sound of hooves came from near and far, cold iron armors, the tonghou on top rang loudly, carrying with it the unique air of thick vapor in Jiangbei, slowly spreading out like thunder, as if it could awaken the entire northern half of the country. The ready-to-go Sea Dragons along the coast with its steam light lit up one by one, the cold light piercing the dense vapor. The straight light column on the watchtower shot through Jiangbei.

Enemy attack!

Gu Yun couldn't hear clearly, but he recognized the vibration from the ground and the lights coming from the door. After he arrived in Jiangbei, the first thing he did was to strengthen the defense line. In truth, it was only to stabilize the people's hearts. He did not expect that the usually patient Western Navy would indeed choose this time to raid Jiangbei Camp.

Sometimes when one did their best, one also had to obey the destiny of the heavens. Although on this side, they had calculated every move, they were not aware that the enemy's backyard had also caught on fire. Unknown to them, they changed to a commander with an entirely different fighting style.

Gu Yun had no time to think about it. He grabbed his coat and wrapped it around him. When he got up, he staggered as if he had just finished eating five kilos of muscle-softening drug and almost knelt down.

Just then, a Black Eagle flashed across the sky and landed directly at the gate of the Marshal tent. Before he could open his mouth, the red ribbon letter slipped out of his hand and was stepped on by Gu Yun.

Gu Yun struggled to support himself with the head of the bed and bent down to open the letter by the steam light. At the same time, the Black Eagle quickly reported, "Marshal, in the pretext of peace talks to surrender, the Eighteen Tribes brought suicide soldiers and six carts of *Ziliujin* to our border as bait. After detonating to explode into a path, tens of thousands of elite soldiers poured out, intending to break the net."

Gu Yun raised his eyes from the red label letter: "What about the situation? How many casualties are there?"

Black Eagle: "Your subordinate left in a hurry, I do not know!"

Gu Yun calmed down then gritted his teeth. Forcing out a bit of strength, he reached for the Wind Slasher hanging on the bed and shouted, "Bring me a Heavy Armor."

At this time, only the Heavy Armor with its own support could

make up for his fatigued body.

Chang Geng raised his hand and stopped the guard, he turned to Gu Yun and murmured, "Zi Xi, you stay here and keep watch, I'll go."

Gu Yun looked at him with his lips pursed slightly — Chang Geng recognized the expression, which was basically a precursor to him saying ‘no’.

Without waiting for Gu Yun to open his mouth, he rushed to say, "Do you trust me?"

Gu Yun sighed: "I..."

Chang Geng opened his palm: "Give me the Wind Slasher, I will go for you. If you still believe me, don't go out of this tent."

The battle fire in the distance was reflected in Chang Geng's eyes, and it was like a fire in his pupils, burning like the nation of Great Liang at its last breath then was reborn once again.

Chang Geng tentatively grasped one end of the Wind Slasher, slowly and firmly pulled it out of Gu Yun's hand — it was not difficult, Gu Yun's wrist contained no strength, even trembling a little.

He held the sharp weapon in his hand, slanted it across his shoulder and slightly bowed. "Let me be a soldier for Marshal."

Gu Yun took a deep look at him, then suddenly turned around and said to the Eagle, "Prepare the sand table, you will be a messenger."

Chang Geng left with the blade.

Once the Western sea monsters crossed the ocean, they emerged slowly from the misty river. Under the vast shadows, countless Western Dragons, as fast as tiger sharks, approached slowly. Gu Yun's

previously laid out defense responded to the alarm. At the same time, the three Light Cavalry units of Jiangbei came out in three routes, occupying key ports on the shore, and colliding with the Western Navy intending to land stealthily.

Blood soon flowed down the river, with the artillery fires that had yet to extinguish on the surface, interweaving into a brilliant sea of fireworks.

"Don't stop the large explosive," Chang Geng spurred out. "In the intermittent, push Baihong arrows up in their place. All Eagle Armors stand by immediately during the interval, there is half a minute for you to assemble to suppress the situation in the air. We must not let the Eagle Armors on their sea monster's main ship to take off, lock them down at their spot!'

"Close the right wing!"

"Dragons in the entire harbour, ready the gunpowder, charge at once!"

The messenger at his side thought for a moment that he had misheard him: "Your Highness said the entire harbour? Do we launch a full scale battle?"

Chang Geng lowered his eyes and glanced at him on his horse back. "All of it, let the foreigners see that Great Liang also has naval forces."

The weak Great Liang Navy was once vulnerable to attack, even having its commander die in battle. In a hurry, it was tidied up by a civil officer who could not even ride a horse properly and fled to the north in panic.

A year ago, the scattered old Navy units, together with their lost comrades from the four sides, formed an army that could not be more mixed, and returned to the place where they were originally humiliated. Many people who came from the six factions of the Army were seasick. Many people couldn't find the North and the South when they get to the surface of the water. Many people couldn't cope with the complicated mode of operation of the Dragons of Great

Liang that was falling behind in technologies...

Right now, it all seemed to be from a lifetime ago.

Since the establishment of the Jiangbei Navy, after two huge reorganizations and redesigns, the Ling Shu Institute had upgraded three times the Great Liang naval warships and sent over the amazingly fast 'tiger shark' ships imitated from the Westerners last year.

At this time, along the two sides of the river, there was a rare north wind raising up. The bright lamp burning in General Zhong's praying hall illuminated a piece of land, the white tent stood out among the crowded Jiangbei like a soul summoning sign, as if his soul still lingered.

This blade that had been tempered must be sharpened with the enemy's blood.

Gu Yun could neither see nor hear clearly. He could only judge the distance of the exchange of fire by the tremor coming from his feet. He was not even in the frontline of the battle. However, he did not panic. The Black Eagle was shocked to find that the whole defense of Jiangbei was in his mind, where the strong or weak points were, where the enemy would choose to make breakthroughs and so on,...his speculations were entirely spot on.

Now that the command of the front line had been handed over to Chang Geng, Gu Yun simply and generously gave him unreserved overall trust, without making a single instruction of his own. The three armed forces in Jiangbei were all for Chang Geng to command.

Gu Yun generally monitored the overall situation of the war, while calculating the distribution of *Ziliujin* and ammunition everywhere. At the same time, he was holding the red label letter from the Northern Frontier, his efforts had been divided into two routes, landing in the two ongoing battles North and South of the whole territory of Great Liang.

The unexpected deployment of the Westerners this time was for the sake of the barbarians. Ultimately, it was for the sake of

negotiating interests. If the northern battlefield could withstand, the Westerners would simply be clowns jumping about, but if the northern battlefield failed——

Jiangbei was bombarded with artillery in the haze, while the Northern Frontier was boiling endlessly in the silver-coated plain.

Jia Lai had used suicide soldiers and his son to open the way, setting off *Ziliujin*, then a large number of Northern Barbarian warriors rushed out like mad, as if wanted to perish altogether with their enemy.

Shen Yi made a decisive decision and withdrew the Black Iron Camp, which had already penetrated the enemy's hinterland for more than ten miles, and galloped like mad on the snow.

The Black Iron Camp's quality need not be mentioned, running at incredible speed, the barbarians became only a single thin line in the distance.

The barbarians changed their faces faster than turning over the pages of a book. The garrison in the Northern Frontier had become accustomed to this style of their good neighbor. With a signal from the Black Iron Camp, they were immediately mobilized.

He Rong Hui and Shen Yi have been working together for many years. Needless to say, the reinforcement kept up with him quickly and cut across the long front.

Who knew that Jia Lai had used everything he had, when the cavalry opened, several Heavy Chariots which they had not been willing to use for many years were revealed. Hundreds of Heavy Armor poured out, using fire power to push a big net, colliding with the black whirlwind that was the Black Iron Camp. The frontline was momentarily in a stalemate.

Less than half an hour later, the Northern Man's reinforcements arrived — but it wasn't human or steel armor, it was a large number

of *Ziliujin* escort trucks. Large quantities of *Ziliujin* were transformed into vapor one after another on the front line of the Northern Frontier. The bitter and cold snow wind couldn't sweep away the hot air. The temperature rose sharply. Large areas of ice and snow turned into hot springs and dispersed into the dry land. The surrounding white fog made the scene engulfed in a haze, the purple fire formed a tragic spectacle between heaven and earth.

When the iron armor was a bit closer, the surface temperature would start to burn. The barbarians would use their carts, their people and their hearts of the earth as fuel, pushing out continuously in a decisive way as if to hollow out their own land in order to open the way with this battle.

In the evening, the Black Iron Camp had to retreat again.

Chapter 111: Eternal

—

Ten years passed by, there will be the next ten to come; a hundred years passed by, there will be the next hundred to come.

—

Chaos was on the battlefield of the Northern Frontier. Jia Lai Ying Huo, with no children and heir left, was crazy. He would rather destroy everything altogether than leave a drop of *Ziliujin* to the enemy. When they did not have enough power to contest against the Black Iron Camp, they would use *Ziliujin* to break open a path.

With the help of the karmic flame, the two sides were able to fight neck to neck in difficulty, while Great Liang's side was feeling both irritated and helpless. Going back and forth in this way, in a flash, it was already the third day.

Cao Chun Hua no longer paid attention to appearance, taking off the ermine hat and fanned himself continuously. Even so, hot sweat continued to flow down his temples. He looked at Shen Yi currently half-naked enviously: "My God, when had February in the Northern Frontier ever been this warm? General Shen, are you cool?"

Shen Yi glared at him angrily and scolded internally, *"Cool my ass!"*

There was a large burn on his back, there was no time for it to be treated back at the frontline. At this time, having a moment to rest thanks to He Rong Hui replacing him, he had taken off his armor to apply the medicine. The scalded blister had broken the skin, his back was a mess of flesh and blood, appearing like he had just been skinned.

Chen Qing Xu saw that his shoulders had been stiff all this time, she quickly asked, "General, was I being too rough?"

Shen Yi shook his head with a red face and red ears. At this time,

even the hot scald was not comparable to the burn to his inner self-respect — it was too unorthodox and unsightly to bare his naked back and chest to a grown woman. He almost had no face left to talk to Miss Chen.

Chen Qing Xu only thought that his ears and neck reddened due to the heat, her mood was a little complicated.

Although she had been in and out of all kinds of skirmishes in the pugilist world and stayed in the station of wounded soldiers for a while, she rarely had the chance to experience being directly on the battlefield.

This time, it was different from when Gu Yun tricked Wei Wang's rebellion army that year. When tens of thousands of soldiers who had experienced hundreds of battles clashing with each other, the voices of people, horses, and gunfire around them were in chaos. When someone in the midst was a little distracted, they would not be able to distinguish anything, being able to keep up with the commander's instructions was already the result of many years of harsh training, let alone making command themselves and thoroughly considering everything.

In this situation, no matter how high one's skill was or how sharp they were, the effect that one could create was also very limited. Even the stone pillars that could support the sky would be submerged by the ocean of people and walls of fire.

Batch after batch of wounded soldiers was sent to her, either missing an arm or lacking a leg, there was every kind of miserable imaginable. Now she finally knew how those wounded soldiers came to be.

"It was like a demonic cave swallowing up flesh." Chen Qing Xu thought quietly, quickly removing Shen Yi's rotten flesh then cleaned it and applied the medicine. When the two armies directly came face to face, Shen Yi had to pay attention to all four directions, yet in such a chaotic situation, he still paid attention to her, grabbed her bridle and gave her a fixed look, then said with embarrassment, *"Stay by my side."*

There was no telling why, Chen Qing Xu's impression towards that gaze was much deeper than the fierce flame of war in the sky.

"The general can't wear Light Armor any more," said Chen Qing Xu. "Light Armor is too heavy. If it was pressed on your body, it will rub against your wound all the time. In case of infection and fever, it will not be easy to deal with."

Shen Yi was sweating all over, although his rational side knew that the other had no special meaning, hearing her advice in a low voice, his goosebumps still arose all over. His skin did not know whether to continue sweating or to shudder silently, and thus was also in confusion.

Fortunately, at this time, a messenger came to his rescue. The messenger ran in while breathless, "General Shen! General Cai was just swept by the long cannons of the barbarians and fell down from his horse. The Barbarians wanted to break through our northern defense line with that side!"

Shen Yi stood up abruptly, pulling the burnt wound behind his back. It was so painful he wished he could scream and cry to the heavens. However, as the temporary commander, and being in front of the person of his interest, he could not afford to do so.

"Report — General! Urgent letter from Jiangnan!"

When Gu Yun went to Jiangnan to capture Chang Geng who ran from home, it took the Black Eagle two or three days to fly from the ancient Silk Road in the western regions. Now, the golden box improved by Ling Shu Institute had been greatly speeded up. In an emergency, it takes less than one day to fly from Jiangbei to the Northern Frontier.

In such a chaotic situation, Gu Yun was like a pillar of support for Shen Yi's heart. After hearing so, his spirit relaxed, his whole body shook and he nearly fell face first. His hand searched around in the air, subconsciously grabbing something. After returning to his senses, he found out that it was a hand lent to him by Miss Chen.

Miss Chen's hand was much like the person herself — quite cold.

Her fingers were very small and boney, but her thin bones were very sturdy, with the strength of a master.

Shen Yi: "..."

He was about to die of embarrassment...

Shen Yi hurriedly took back his hand and rushed to meet the messenger: "What did the Marshal say?"

The Black Eagle messenger said without a break: "The Western troops in Jiangnan raided the Northern Camp. The commander entrusted me to tell the generals that if the battlefield in the north could not be defended, please be ready to go face the ancestors to ask for forgiveness!"

Shen Yi felt on the spot the heavy pressure resembling Mount Tai hitting him head-on. The word ‘ancestor’ almost caused him to vomit blood. He really wanted to cry without tears. He had never envied the prestige of commanding the three armies of Gu Yun before. Now, he wished he could scream and cry for Gu Yun to come back from Jiangnan to replace him.

Didn't they agree he would come back after taking a look?

Didn't they say he was just a temporary commander?

Shen Yi thought that the biggest problem in his life was that he made friends carelessly. He couldn't figure it out. Wasn't he a commonplace person with excessive love and no ambition? He never wanted to bow himself to be a senior official or a wealthy man, nor did he expect to leave his name in history forever. How could the heavy burden of the Northern Frontier fall on him?

He Rong Hui came in with the heatwave: "Ji Ping, Old Cai's side can't stand it anymore, I will go as reinforcement!"

Shen Yi quickly returned to his senses, pinched the bridge of his nose and took Gu Yun's order: "Now all these Barbarians are under the pressure of Black Eagles. You can't leave yet. Let me think about it again..."

"General Shen, this lowly general is willing to go!"

Shen Yi looked up and saw a young man standing in the corner. He must be around twenty years old, the childish hint on his face had not yet dissipated. Cao Chun Hua whispered, "That young general is the youngest son of General Cai. He has constantly been the vanguard of the northern garrison. He is only nineteen years old, but the amounts of times clashing with the barbarian is no less than a dozen."

"I will go," said the young man. Seeing that Shen Yi looked at him, he took a step forward, his words as firm as a nail. "I would rather die than to let the Barbarians invade even a step!"

For a moment, Shen Yi was shocked and felt that he saw Gu Yun from that year... At that time, the news of the rebellion in the Western Regions arrived in the capital city. The former emperor who was immersed in singing and dancing with the court officials looked dazedly at one another. The great court meeting on the next day was a mess. Some people even proposed the idea of hanging the notice to look for the old general Zhong Chan who had already resigned and retired... the Gu family's orphan put a stop to the quarreling with not an ounce of confusion.

At the age of seventeen, Gu Yun still had the arrogance of a newborn calf that was not afraid of a tiger: *"Your subject is willing to go, the border area of the Western Regions, they are nothing but a group of clowns jumping about. Do they really think that the Wind Slasher is so rusty it cannot cut down the heads of rats?"*

Now, little general Cai sniffed and said without blinking, "These northern wild dogs only relied on a critical area to hold on. Although I am still young and ignorant, I can still wield the sword and spear from my father's hand, I will make sure that they can come but will not be able to return!"

The famous generals of the older generation either died on the battlefield, or were broken by old age. However, the rivers and mountains remained unchanged. There were still young people wearing black armor and pulling Baihong, ignorant of the world, stepping out from the crowd.

Ten years passed by, there will be the next ten to come; a hundred years passed by, there will be the next hundred to come.

Shen Yi's confused mind suddenly settled down, he handed the plaque to the young general Cai: "Good brother, go."

Young General Cai accepted the order and left. Shen Yi opened Gu Yun's urgent message.

Gu Yun's oral message to the Black Eagle was ferocious and left no room for survival, but what was written inside was very logical: *"The Barbarians risked their lives in this battle, just like beasts in distress, not to mention the Eighteen Tribes' previous internal fight, it will be difficult to go on for a long time. The first three or five days were the most difficult to endure. Once the front line is defended, you only need to hold them back for a few days. The Barbarians will be prosperous at first, then weaken, and be exhausted afterwards. At this time, the armistice will continue to sow discord. In the future, the Northern Frontier's situation may be settled once and for all, proceed with caution, but there is no need to fear. Although I was not able to come, I exist alongside with the Black Iron Camp's three armies."*

Shen Yi's eyes momentarily felt his eyes become hot: "Command all units, defend at all cost and hold them back!"

And Gu Yun, who boasted that he was with the Black Iron Camp, did not write this letter easily. He managed to steady his hand until he finished sealing, at that point, battle reports had piled up.

Not knowing whether Chang Geng wanted him to feel reassured or what, he specially assigned a team of Light Cavalry to go back and forth between the battlefield and the camp, presenting the battle report immediately. Gu Yun seldom had a battle in which he did not need to be present his whole life, it was quite a fresh feeling. There was no redundant information in the Marshal tent to disturb his thinking, nor there was a need to evade sharp arrows, or to be affected by the fierce emotions in the battlefield. He looked at the war situation from the perspective of a bystander.

At the beginning of the war, the test was whether the basic patrol of Jiangbei Camp was strict and whether the Navy was alert enough. General Zhong and Gu Yun laid a solid foundation, they could easily bear the heavy bombardment of the Western Army.

However, when all the above had been destroyed and the strength of the two armies were similar, the rest depended on the commander's experience and talent.

Gu Yun really broke out in a sweat — as the Black Eagle read the war report to him, he knew that the commander of the other side was a strategic expert and a true master of naval battle. Even if he went to the battle himself, he would still have to act carefully.

The Black Eagle rushed in and reported the latest development: "There is a single enemy fleet in the southwest. His Highness *Yan Wang* adjusted the forward path and intended to stab them there."

Gu Yun's heart thumped, he stood up abruptly — when the two armies were facing each other, the commander must keep his blood hot and his heart cold, it was different from the pioneer who took courage as the first priority.

If inexperienced people were taken over by a crazed bloodlust, they would easily become hot-headed.

Gu Yun was quick in deciding to break his promise: "Take my armor and prepare my horse!"

Chang Geng was extremely exhausted during this battle. It was different from the defense of the city wall. At that time, he only had to worry about only one piece of land above and below the city wall, he was also determined to die. This time, behind him was the boundless north half of the nation and the tens of thousands of Jiangbei sailors.

The Jiangnan Navy didn't have an Eagle Army before. The time of the establishment of the Eagle Camp was shorter than that of the

Navy. There was no need to mention the Black Eagle. Even the Eagles in the Northern Camp were easier to command than them. The enemy, centered around the sea monsters that were almost invulnerable, gradually controlled the pace of the battlefield after the first wave of high-altitude attacks. Chang Geng was eager to find a breakthrough, otherwise they would remain passive. The vanguard forces just tore open the enemy's left wing, he instinctively pushed the main fleet up——

But after all, Chang Geng's nature was calm and careful. Halfway through the pursuit, he felt that it was not good, but unfortunately, it was too late.

The small ships of the Western army had closed in at full speed and cut off his retreat.

"What should we do, Your Highness? Will we turn back?"

Chang Geng's hands were cold and sweaty. Gu Yun's words sounded in his ears — on the battlefield, whoever didn't want to die, died first.

"Where can we turn back to? Full speed ahead!" Chang Geng said coldly, "It's just a group of flies that are following. Don't mind them. Keep with the original plan and pierce the enemy's left wing!"

He wanted to turn the whole fleet into a brave and fearless pioneer. Wasn't the enemy intending to catch turtles in a jar?

Then he will break open their jar.

The messenger heard the fierce and hoarse killing intention from his words, his hair stood up: "Roger!"

The sea Dragons resembled a rotating Wind Slasher, moving into the enemy's hinterland and engaging in combat.

Chang Geng knew that if he could not defeat the enemy in a flash, the pursuers would soon arrive behind him. At that time, it would be difficult for him to endure the attack on both fronts.

All the long guns and shotguns in the range were loaded, the

small light in the night was shining from the sea Dragons. It was the golden box of the gun. Chang Geng wiped the sweat in his hand on the bag filled with tranquilizer and was about to make his command.

At this time, a very strange thing happened.

The enemy, who was standing in front of him, unexpectedly retreated!

Chang Geng: "..."

What are they scheming?

However, the fleet at full speed couldn't be stopped. The naval forces of Great Liang directly shuttled out of the enemy without any resistance. Through the eyes of the Qian Li Yan at night, they could see a flag officer on the enemy's main ship was signalling to this side, ordering them not to retreat.

However, the retreating Western small fleet did not listen to the master ship at all. It was extremely quick to resist, unwilling to be the vanguard to attract the artillery of the Great Liang's naval forces.

Chang Geng couldn't figure out what was wrong with the opponent for a while, but he could not miss the opportunity that only came once. He immediately ordered to turn around the muzzle of the guns. The whole river was blown open. The Western tiger sharks behind them couldn't dodge while moving at high speed and was bombed. The bombed small ship would detonate the gold box as a chain reaction, one ship lead to another, the fire spread out, the river surface boiled up, the Great Liang navy was able to make a stab without danger and recovered safely.

On the main ship of the Western army, Master Ja was furious: "Bastard! How dare he oppose an order on the battlefield!"

The Pope's cheeks were as taut as a knife.

The fleet that had just fled unexpectedly was the left wing in charge of by the messenger.

At this time, the messenger was also gnashing his teeth - he was originally only the escort support, but that Pope old man actually made him into a disguised vanguard after several changes of formation!

He was not able to react until the Navy of Great Liang came in front of him. He almost became a decoy and cannon fodder. If he died in the hands of the people of Great Liang on the battlefield, even His Majesty the King couldn't find any fault.

The messenger refused to take this loss. He did not think twice to retreat immediately, destroying the whole formation of the Western Navy without hesitation.

Chang Geng was like a poisonous snake. Once he seized the opportunity to turn the tables, he immediately bombarded the enemy to avenge for making him break out in a cold sweat. The Westerners suddenly fell passive.

At the same time, the situation suddenly changed. The Light Cavalry, who was in charge of the war report on the shore, immediately rushed into the marshal tent and reported to Gu Yun.

Gu Yun, who had been dressed in armor, had a strange look for a long time. At last, he was helpless. He suddenly felt that the saying 'the fortune of Great Liang stood behind Yan Wang' was not arrogance, but perhaps the truth.

He turned his horse and quietly went back to the Marshal tent. He unloaded his armor and hid it. He strictly ordered everyone around him not to disclose that he had been out of the tent.

When Chang Geng seized the opportunity, the Western army lost one wing, which was equivalent to losing a leg. Under the condition of disadvantage, the Pope, who was rampaging on the sea, struggled

with Yan Wang, the new recruit. Neither of them could do anything to the other, fighting until dawn.

Gu Yun turned off the steam lamp, took up his pen and wrote three letters in succession: one was requesting *Ziliujin* distribution, the other was pushed to the nearest Ling Shu Institute branch, asking for the supply of fire engine steel armor, and the last one drew up a briefing to be delivered to the capital.

Later, he rubbed his stiff neck and told the Black Eagle, "Tell *Yan Wang* that if the foreigners withdraw, there is no need to go after them."

The Black Eagle was stunned.

However, before he asked Gu Yun how he knew that the Westerners were going to withdraw, another messenger rushed in: "Marshal, the main ship of the foreigners began to withdraw to the south!"

Gu Yun was not surprised. He waved his hand naturally. The Black Eagle didn't dare to delay. He rushed out of the marshal tent to deliver the words.

He didn't have to be distracted to deal with all kinds of emergencies on the spot and was able to think about the whole war situation wholeheartedly. At a glance, he had already estimated the *Ziliujin* amount of the enemy's troops this time and knew that the battle tonight had touch their last reserve.

The enemy wasted their *Ziliujin* and returned in vain, but also suffered heavy casualties. After returning, there must be an internal fight among themselves. In this case, instead of advancing, it would be more effective for Great Liang Navy to create pressure from afar.

After another half hour, the Western Navy did indeed retreat, their sneak attack at night ended up a failure, even the north bank had not been landed on.

In order to show his 'strict commitment' of not leaving the tent, Gu Yun only stood at the door to meet Chang Geng, not caring about

how his body was covered in blood, opening his arms and hugged him.

At this point, Chang Geng finally felt exhaustion soak through his body. He wrapped his arms around Gu Yun's waist dizzily and murmured in his ear, "I never want to let you go on the battlefield again."

Chapter 112: Urgent

—

"I'm running out of time." Chang Geng thought silently.

—

Chang Geng's voice was low and ambiguous. Even if it was close to his ear, Gu Yun didn't hear it clearly. He turned to Chang Geng in confusion and asked, "What did you say?"

Chang Geng's eyes skimmed over one of his eyes that was covered by the liuli glass. His body was exhausted, but his blood was still boiling so much that his mouth was hot and dry. For a split second, he wanted to hug him in public and get intimate with him in front of everyone. But when he saw the Master Liao Ran's 'indifferent to all worldly temptations' face from afar, he suddenly realized he had overstepped the boundary. With a smile, he silently reflected himself for a moment and let go of Gu Yun's waist. He took up his hand and calmed himself little by little with the feeble but stable pulse: "Nothing - I saw the messenger going north just now, is it a report to the capital?"

"Yes," Gu Yun nodded. "This time, I want the imperial court to come forward and send people to contact with the foreigners. We had always been passive before. This time, we should be confident."

Chang Geng: "You intend to negotiate peace?"

"No," Gu Yun said faintly, "How can we let the others sleep peacefully by our bedside? Besides, this blood debt is not yet repaid. The fertile land in Jiangnan is occupied by these animals, it is sickening even in a dream."

Chang Geng immediately responded, "You are going to stall them, nibbling away at them slowly?"

On one hand, they would send out the signals of peace negotiations to let the enemies who have no strength left to harbor hope and leave

room for them to fight within themselves.

On the other hand, they would sometimes put forward excessive demands, sometimes create regional disputes within a small range, and slowly push back the enemy's front. In this way, they could train their soldiers through the war. When the time was right, the north side fully prepared, and the young Jiangbei Navy matured, they would move south again for battle.

Gu Yun made an '*Mm*' sound, letting him take him by the hand into the Marshal tent, he wiped Chang Geng's face with a smile: "Your Highness, your face is dirty."

Chang Geng felt half of his bones soften by the sudden gentle care of the other, but he was instantly alerted, feeling that such a soft attitude from him would not spell anything good.

Sure enough, Gu Yun sat on one side, holding Chang Geng's hand and caressed it in his palm for a while and said, "There's another thing."

Chang Geng raised his eyebrow and looked at him expressionlessly.

Gu Yun held Chang Geng's palm in one hand, and covered it with the other. He lowered his head and kissed the tip of the finger with a cut on it: "I was planning to stall them to clean up the North first."

Chang Geng: "You want to go back to the Northern Frontier?"

Gu Yun nodded.

Chang Geng: "When?"

Gu Yun: "...Very soon. "

Gu Yun's 'soon' basically meant to leave at any time according to the development of the Western enemy and the damage of the Jiangbei naval army. If he felt that the situation of the Jiangbei garrison was alright today, he would leave during the night. If there was anything that still required adjustment and deployment, he would make orders through the night and leave the next morning.

Chang Geng: "What will you do then? Do you run back and forth

between both ends?"

Gu Yun was silent, it seemed that he had acknowledged it.

He suddenly felt he was at fault with Chang Geng. On the way to the western regions that year, Gu Yun once vowed to Chen Qing Xu that even if Chang Geng would go mad in the future, he would still take care of him until the end. But recently, he was always secretly worried how one day, he would no longer have enough strength.

Gu Yun was not afraid of sickness, old age, and death. General Zhong's praying hall was on the side. Thinking about it now, no matter how kind or malicious the elders around him were, those who once taught him, harmed him, were all gone. He knew that even the heroes of the world could not escape such things. People didn't have to be so aggressive with themselves, he was only afraid that he couldn't protect this little madman all the time, on the contrary, even making the other feel more tired, more burdened.

Gu Yun's deep and sincere apology left Chang Geng feeling at a loss for a moment. At first, he was unable to respond to it. For a long time, he realized that someone had carved out a gap in his heart, blood inside was pouring all over, unable to stop.

His heartache was difficult to repress, he could only pretend to smile happily.

"Alright," Chang Geng said in a light and not excessive tone, "Don't worry. Have you seen the drawing I put in your clothes? Soon - after you finish cleaning up the Barbarians, maybe all the steam rail trains on my side will be finished building, do you believe it?"

Soon, he would be able to build up a Great Liang with four sides at peace. Perhaps at that time, the three factions of Black Iron Camp only need to guard the entrance of the ancient Silk Road to maintain trade order, or simply open up wasteland in the border collectively. Whether his general wanted to drink grape wine at the border or to return to the capital city to fight with birds, he could take all the time he needed, he would no longer have to rush to be on the road, or be exhausted with so many things.

Gu Yun said helplessly: "How come you're already cocky after just a small battle? You should think of a way to return to the Grand Council."

Chang Geng bent down: "If I succeed, how would you reward me?"

Gu Yun said generously, "What do you want?"

Chang Geng thought about it and said something in a low voice near Gu Yun's ear.

No one knew how shameless His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* was being in discrete that even Gu Yun, as a half-deaf man, could not listen to him anymore. He laughed and scolded: "Go away!"

This sentence hit Master Yao who came to report the postwar situation head-on. Yao Zhen said in confusion, "Where does the Marshal want me to go?"

Chang Geng, with his hands behind his back, straightened his waist with an unfathomable expression, stood up as a noble and reserved flower.

However, when Gu Yun concentrated on talking with Yao Zhen, he retracted the complacent smile he deliberately feigned, his face became heavier and heavier.

"*I'm running out of time*." Chang Geng thought silently.

In the end, Gu Yun lingered until the next day, accompanied Chang Geng to lit General Zhong Chan an incense, eating a bowl of hot porridge cooked by *Yan Wang* himself in the tent. As usual, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the green contents inside and implicitly declared his ambition of 'not wanting to be a sheep', that was also ignored as usual. In order not to become a sheep, he had to eat them without chewing.

He set off early the next morning for the Northern Frontier.

When Gu Yun arrived in the Northern Frontier, he was glad to find

that Shen Yi was not yet done for, he really was able to hold back the crazy barbarians, protecting the northern area.

The crazier Jia Lai was, the nearer the end of the Eighteen Tribes was. As Gu Yun expected, after four or five days of fierce fighting, the offensive from the Barbarians slowed down significantly. A stronghold was razed to the ground by the over-excited young General Cai on his pursuit. They found that there was only a bit of Ziliujin left inside. The people had retreated.

Cao Chun Hua said with his arms and legs flailing, saliva splattering: "Jia Lai can make a move, which means that the previous rebel forces have been eliminated or at least suppressed by him, but he still needs to fight and employ people, it is impossible for him to kill all the subordinate forces of the other major tribes. At most, he would deal with several leaders and make an example of them. The rebel forces may still be able to revive."

Shen Yi: "We have to have an opportunity."

"That's right," Cao Chun Hua said, "General Cai told me that day, before, there used to be Barbarians who secretly exchanged *Ziliujin* for materials. General Cai had kept this in mind, secretly monitored the transaction, recorded every transaction down and even made portraits for the frequent visitors. I took a look at them the other day and actually saw an acquaintance."

As he spoke, he took out a simple drawing from his sleeve, spreading it out on the small table, pointing at a man in the picture: "This man is a slave in charge of horses under Jia Lai Ying Huo. I know him, he was the chief manager's man. Normally, he always acts like a tyrant using the name of the chief... I think that as the people have been suffering from many years of war, it is not only the ones with ambitions in the Eighteen Tribes who are dissatisfied with Jia Lai. I feel that there's something for us to make use of here. "

"How certain are you?" Gu Yun asked.

Cao Chun Hua gave him a flirtatious look and said with his tongue curled: "It depends on how much resources Marshal has prepared for me."

Gu Yun thought to himself, *"If this child had been around me for a long time in his childhood, I would have beaten these bad habits out of him."*

To let him out of sight, out of mind, he waved his hand and let Cao Chun Hua go.

Before Shen Yi could ask about the specific plan of action, the soldiers came to report that Chen Qing Xu had arrived.

Gu Yun clucked his tongue and watched with astonishment how Shen Yi had changed from leaning about to sitting upright. His face tightened as if facing a fearsome enemy. He had never been so serious even when having an audience with the Emperor.

Chen Qing Xu came to inform them that she planned to go with Cao Chun Hua to search for the secret witchcraft of the goddess at Jia Lai Ying Huo's place.

Shen Yi panicked as he heard this, signaling Gu Yun with his eyes. Gu Yun looked at the sky and the ground, pretending that he didn't know a thing. After many years of acquaintance, he had understood a little about the personality of Chen's family. Miss Chen only came to inform them out of politeness, not to ask for their opinion.

As Gu Yun could not be counted on at the critical moment, Shen Yi went to the battle with half of his paralyzed tongue and said: "A miracle doctor like Miss Chen is very valuable. You shouldn't even come to the front line, let alone sneak into the enemy base, it is too careless - in case something happens... Is that right, Marshal? "

Gu Yun had to dance along, "Mm, yes, Ji Ping is right."

Chen Qing Xu said: "I'm going north this time to sneak into the tent of Jia Lai Ying Huo to find their lost witchcraft. Wouldn't it be better if I could also help a little bit? I understand my own limit in this matter. Thank you, generals, for your concern."

Gu Yun sighed, "I'm really sorry to have troubled you running around."

At this point, Chen Qing Xu remembered that Chang Geng's interrogative letter was still on her desk, her face paled: "Marshal

does not need to feel that way, just mention my difficulties in front of His Royal Highness *Yan Wang* occasionally."

Shen Yi: "..."

That Gu just agreed he was being reasonable, how come it had turned to 'troubled you for running around'?

The bastard could never keep to his opinion from start to end!

Shen Yi tried to search for all kinds of reasons - *danger in the enemy line?*

With Miss Chen's skill and bravery of breaking into the prison under the guard of the Northern Camp, this reason was a little unspeakable.

Then... *the wounded soldiers need you?*

Her willingness to stay to help was a matter of sentiment, and if she was unwilling to, it was also within reason. The wounded camp had its own military doctors, most of which are simple works of bandaging, which also insulted Doctor Chen's skills.

Chen Qing Xu was not a talkative person either. With Shen Yi's words being stuck this way, she felt that she had finished speaking, turning around and was ready to leave.

"Miss Chen!" Shen Yi stood up in a panic and nearly crashed the desk in front of him.

Gu Yun covered his face in silence.

Shen Yi's thousands of words in his chest were already lined up and waiting to come out to express his feelings. Unexpectedly, when the words came to his mouth, the last gate did not want to be opened no matter what, they were all blocked in his throat. Finally, only one bitter and dry sentence came out, "Is Miss Chen doing this for *Yan Wang*?"

Gu Yun: "..."

Does he think I am dead or something?

As Shen Yi's words left his mouth, he also wished he could slap himself, these were not a human's words.

Fortunately, Chen Qing Xu did not think much about it. Hearing this, she only said seriously: "Since *Yan Wang* holds the Lin Yuan emblem, shouldering heavy responsibility and a high position, it's also the responsibility of Chen family to remove the Bone of Impurity for him. Moreover, the witchcraft of the Eighteen Tribes has no communication with the Central Plains, many strange poisons do not have antidotes, many methods to cure and save people also lost among the old papers. Since I have this chance, I must try my best. Even if only meager bits can be passed down in the future, it will not be in vain. "

Shen Yi's chest grew cold as he listened, between the person who only wanted to have his wife and children beside him all day long like himself and Miss Chen who thought about generations to come, the distance truly was as far as the capital to the Northern Frontier.

Between his father, who only knew how to play and retired early passed down his family-style, and the Chen family, who guarded the Lin Yuan wooden emblem for generations and hid away from the world, the distance was as far as Great Liang to the Westerners.

Even the flying Black Eagle forever could not reach!

Shen Yi looked at her plain white face and had nothing to say, so he brought out a small signal bullet and handed it to Chen Qing Xu: "This is the latest one from Ling Shu Institute. It doesn't need to be lit by an open fire. Just throw it into the air. As long as it is high enough, it will ignite by itself. It can be seen from a hundred miles away. In case anything happens... I... You..."

This incoherent speeches caused Gu Yun to feel his tooth ache.

Chen Qing Xu's hand was stuffed with the small signal bullet still carrying body temperature. Even if she was any colder, at this time, she also felt something. She looked at Shen Yi with an indescribable gaze.

Shen Yi could no longer bear it, he was about to dig a hole and bury

himself. He hurriedly made up an excuse to say goodbye to Gu Yun and ran away.

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

Gu Yun stood up slowly and said to Chen Qing Xu seriously: "If there is any abnormal change with the Barbarians, you don't have to push it too hard, just release the signal, We will send someone to assist immediately. Pay more attention to safety... When you return victorious, just call Shen Ji Ping over to sing a song for you."

Chen Qing Xu nodded hearing the first half, but as she heard the last half, she felt that it was strange: "What song?"

Marshal Gu who could not be proper even in death said smilingly: "Song of the Yue.*"

*越人歌, *Yue Ren Ge, this folk song was passed on as a song about being secretly in love*

That night, Chen Qing Xu and Cao Chun Hua crossed the Northern Barbarian defense line and quietly entered the metropolis of the Eighteen Tribes.

The 'metropolis' was actually only a relatively lively tribal settlement compared to other areas. Except for murderous barbarian warriors occasionally walking back and forth, most of the civilians on the roadside were all in ragged clothing.

The corpse of a child died by starvation that no one had buried was lying on the side of the road, coveted by a group of drooling wild dogs. A woman with a dull face lingered around for a moment, then finally accepted her fate, standing up and walked away like a living corpse.

Among the gorgeous noble tents were the Heavy Armors strictly keeping guard. The vultures hovered in the sky with the Eagle Armors. The stench of corpses and blood scattered everywhere... There was also a subtle fragrance of *Ziliujin* among it.

At a place in the center, under the Wolf King's banner, a man of medium height walked into the Wolf King's residence with a bowl of medicine. The guards on both sides greeted respectfully: "Chief steward. "

The chief only made an '*Mm*' sound without lifting his eyes and went into the Wolf King's tent with the medicine.

A gaunt young man came out and took the medicine bowl: "Let me do it."

The chief looked at him and asked, "Your Highness, how is our King doing today?"

"Same as usual." The Prince shook his head and joined him in walking inside.

The thick felt separated both sides, letting in the sunlight, there was a wheelchair equipped with a golden box on which sat a tall and large 'skeleton'. Hearing the movement, the 'skeleton' slowly turned the wheelchair to face the visitors, eyes opened in a slit.

His eyes had not yet turned turbid, shining incredibly bright, the spirit of the whole body were concentrated in these fierce and cruel eyes.

It was none other than Jia Lai Ying Huo.

Sometime last year, the Wolf King, Jia Lai Ying Huo, was seriously ill. He suddenly had a stroke and fell into a coma, unable to speak clearly after waking up, he was bedridden for a long time. Several tribal leaders of the Eighteen Tribes Alliance assumed that he was finished and joined hands to launch a coup. They imprisoned the Wolf King's Crown Prince, pushed the cowardly Second Prince to the top, then busily tried to appease Great Liang and sent people for peace talks.

But who knew that even the Wolf King, whose even bodyguard captain had 'betrayed' him, could still turn the table. First, he secretly let the bodyguard captain sneak into the peace negotiation mission to cause the incident of the Northern border of Great Liang. No one

knew that he still had a group of vanguard Heavy Armors from the Westerners that year in his hand as the trump card. Using the time when several tribal leaders are dealing with Great Liang's troubles to secretly scheming, taking the rebel party down with one move, using blood to wash the Wolf King flag of alliance, then suddenly gathering a hundred thousand tons of *Ziliujin* to fight back against Great Liang.

The chief lowered his head and dared not look at him. He listened respectfully to the conversation between Jia Lai Ying Huo and the Prince. This man was too terrifying, every hair on his body gave off the scent of blood.

Suddenly, Jia Lai threw the medicine bowl in his hand onto the Prince: "Useless!"

The chief shivered.

The prince said carefully: "Father, there is not enough supplies. This year, half of the old people and children in all tribes starved to death. There are bodies everywhere that can't be cleaned up in time..."

Jia Lai roared: "Useless! If there's not enough *Ziliujin*, then go dig for more! If there's not enough materials, then go rob the Central Plains! If it's still not enough then make those nobles donate!"

His tongue was still not very fluent, his words sounded stiff when shouting, the prince's eyes reddened as he said: "Father, we can't surpass the Black Iron Camp on the border of the Central Plains. The nobles can't afford to donate anything anymore. They..."

His words were once again interrupted by the angry scolding of Jia Lai Ying Huo. The news that the Western naval army was fighting against Great Liang in the South came. However, there were always methods for news to be hindered, The news about the naval army surprise attack and its defeat were still on the way. Jia Lai Ying Huo firmly believed that after both the North and the South closed in, it was only a matter of time for them to move a thousand miles a day.

He was as fierce as before, but it seemed that his fierceness had bordered on madness.

The chief watched the Wolf King beating and scolding the prince, he himself taking the cup's lid to the forehead, then silently left and went straight back to his tent, where several aristocrats and the guests from Central Plains were awaiting his news.

Chapter 113: Resistance

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Running in your ancestors' bodies is the bloodline of wolves. Are they all domesticated into dogs now?

—

The chief walked faster and faster. In the end, he almost trotted back to his tent. Even in the aftertaste of the burning of *Ziliujin*, the Northern Frontier was still cold. However, the chief's forehead was breaking out in hot sweat, soaking his sleeves wet as he wiped it while running.

With a heavy heart, he waved back a female slave who was stepping up to serve him, motioned for her not to disturb him then walked into the tent with three layers of heavy curtains.

The chief carefully explored around, confirming that there were no unrelated people nearby, he then closed the doors one by one, sighed with relief, and walked into the room.

Just then, a sudden voice came out of the room: "How is it?"

The chief steward startled, shivering in his own home. His limbs twitched. He stood at the door with his mouth agape. In three and four intakes of breath, he felt that his heart was about to stop beating.

It wasn't until a familiar aristocratic old woman showed half of her face from the dim room that he took in a hard breath, returned to his senses, waved his hands suspiciously and walked into the room with the old woman.

In the north, the days were short and the nights were long, it was difficult to bring light into the living quarters. However, the people in this room had covered all the windows and sat around a worn-out steam lamp in the dark. Some of the influential families in the

Eighteen Tribes Alliance had sent their representatives, several seats away from them were two Great Liang's people, one man and one woman.

Even though they were dressed in the style of the Eighteen Tribes, one could make out the identity of Great Liang people from their faces — the wild and bitter land of the north had engraved its mark on the people, even for aristocrats, one could still see the roughness of a difficult living condition.

These two people were Cao Chun Hua and Chen Qing Xu. They did not put much effort to cover up their identity. After crossing the border, they used several lines of connections left by Cao Chun Hua to contact some nobles of the Eighteen Tribes, claiming that they were the armistice envoy sent by the garrison of Northern Frontier, bribing and asking them to bring them to meet the Wolf King Jia Lai.

The two were very generous, continuously giving gifts, but the more generous they were, the more Cao Chun Hua knew that no one would introduce them. At present, in the eyes of these Barbarian aristocrats, they may have become two money trees. Once they were discovered by the madman Jia Lai, these money trees would be uprooted.

Both of them expressed their desire to see Jia Lai Ying Huo who wanted to find death. At the same time, they communicated with the Eighteen Tribes people whose minds were in disorder. With Cao Chun Hua's three inch tongue of adapting to whoever he speaks with, within a month, these nobles had dared to sit together to discuss about the Wolf King in secret.

At the same time, Chen Qing Xu figured out the guard situation of the Wolf King's tent after several night explorations. The time for the net to be hauled in was approaching.

Someone poured a bowl of horse milk wine for the chief who came in from the outside. The chief took it with his hands shaking and down it with one breath, finally feeling alive again.

He slumped on his back and said in a low voice, "Don't mention it anymore. Even the Crown Prince has been beaten. The Wolf King is

still determined to fight."

Cao Chun Hua said innocently, "The imperial court has sent envoys to the south. Now that there is a truce there, it does not benefit us to engage in battle again. Did the chief not report this to the Wolf King?"

The chief truly had difficulties inside that could not be expressed, his whole body seemed to be leaking water. He raised his hand and wiped the sweat on his forehead. "Little brother, if I were to say that today, I'm afraid you all won't be able to wait for me to return."

The aristocrats of Eighteen Tribes were silent, Cao Chun Hua shook his head and said slowly, "Then there's no other way, I'll tell you the truth. Today, I want to gather together all the people concerned, because we got a letter from Marshal Gu recently. Marshal Gu accused us of not doing our job well, he said that if we don't get results, he will send troops to attack. We have nothing to worry about, the worst that could happen is that we'll be lectured and receive a two-month salary cut after we return, but I know for certain that you all are not willing to fight."

The chief's face wrinkled into a large bitter melon.

At this time, Chen Qing Xu said, "Let's go. We already tried our best."

Chen Qing Xu had an indisputable temperament. When she opened her mouth, she could always make a final decision. Hearing this, before Cao Chun Hua could react, the Northern Barbarian aristocrats had exploded. The old woman sitting at the first seat grabbed her sleeve in panic: "Wait!"

Chen Qing Xu gave her a cold look.

The wrinkles on the old woman's face twisted a few times, turning into the look of a gentle witch, and said with a pleasing smile: "Miss, give us a few more days to think of something. My king is a bit headstrong, but for better or worse I'm still his elder. Let me try to talk to him, you don't have to leave in a hurry."

"Madame, it's not that we are unreasonable," Cao Chun Hua sighed. "We are also acting under orders and dare not make our own decisions."

Chen Qing Xu pulled out her sleeve and said with a light look: "If the Wolf King is determined to fight this war to the end for his own personal revenge, it would probably be useless for Madam to say anything, but on the contrary, you will only lead the fire to burn yourself, I don't think it's necessary."

This sentence pierced the heart of everyone present.

When several tribal leaders joined forces to revolt a while ago, they had brought up the intimate relationship between Jia Lai and the goddess as the topic of discussion. The goddess had been dead for more than twenty years. There was no evidence that there was any hidden relationship between her and Jia Lai. However, once the seeds of doubt were planted, how could they be easily removed?

Jia Lai Ying Huo always incited people to work for him using 'blood feud' and 'outrageous humiliation'. But 'forget the pain when the scar is healed' was the basis of ordinary people. He might be able to incite the blood for a while, but when the material was unsustainable and even eating became a problem, could the 'outrageous humiliation' twenty years ago be more painful than the starving children?

If a person had been dead for so many years but still lingered around and haunted the tribes like a ghost, bringing about war and bloodshed, then was she a pure goddess of eternal life, or an evil demon who deceived the world?

Chen Qing Xu finished, ignoring the different expressions of the Northern Barbarian people, slightly nodded, and went out with Cao Chun Hua.

Seeing that they were determined not to be accommodating, the old Northern Barbarian woman suddenly made up her mind and knocked the cane in her hand on the ground: "From this moment, within two days, I beg you to give us two days. This old woman has lived for more than seventy years, I will use my age as guarantee. In

two days, I will give you a clear answer!"

The old lady had a high rank in the tribes. Even the Wolf King had to refer to her as an aunt. When she opened her mouth, there was no objection. Only the bitter chief moved his lips and was glared back at by the old lady's fierce white eyes.

Cao Chun Hua and Chen Qing Xu looked at each other. They frowned for a long time as if being put under a difficult position. Finally, they reluctantly said: "Then... well, since it's the promise of Madame Hong Xia, we must also give it a try. We'll wait for your good news. Goodbye."

When the two outsiders left from the secret path through the back door, the room of the Northern Barbarian aristocrats finally exploded.

The chief wanted to cry and said to Madame Hong Xia, "Third Madame, did you not hear my words just now? The king is determined to fight this war, even the prince was beaten. Look at my head...right here... the king's original saying is to dig for more if there's no Ziliujin. If there's not enough material, then make you people pay with your own pocket! "

Before Madame Hong Xia could speak, a middle-aged man was already bursting with anger: "How can he still be so immersed in this grand dream of his? Does he want to attack the Central Plains through the defense line of the Black Iron Camp or wait for the Western monkeys to give him food and drink? After twenty years of preparation, we gathered a hundred thousand warriors, countless fire engines and steel armor, stacks of dry food and dried meat, and joined forces with the East, West, North, and South to act at the same time, yet we still failed to step into the Central Plains! Now he's still dreaming like this, what is he relying on? The street full of starving people? I don't think that it would be enough for his stomach even if we scraped our marrow!"

His voice resembled a mountain song when herding sheep, echoing without any conceal. Several people around him immediately showed their fear and urged him to be cautious in his words.

The angry middle-aged man sat down and said with a sneer, "Third Madame, I don't think you can keep your promise this time. Don't say you have to rely on your old age, even if you cry out wanting to hang yourself, that madman Jia Lai won't even pay any mind!"

Madame Hong Xia lifted her dry eyelids and knocked her crane down: "Shut up, useless! What's the point of shouting in this room!"

The middle-aged man snorted indignantly.

Madame Hong Xia was motionless, there were veins showing on the back of her thin claw like hand like roots of an old three. Then, she slowly opened her mouth and said, "Last time, the Wolf King left a secret card to deal with several tribal leaders. Do you think he has a second card?"

There was silence in the room, all were frightened by the old woman's audacity. It took a long time for the chief to tremble and say: "Third Madame,... the blood of the wolf banner had not yet dried."

"To die in revolt or to die by being implicated, what's the difference?" The old lady's hoarse voice rang out in the silence, "Running in your ancestors' bodies is the bloodline of wolves. Are they all domesticated into dogs now? Or would you rather watch your wife and children, old and young ones die of starvation and war just to prolong your life by a few months?"

She slowly raised her head and looked at the barbarian aristocrats with different minds. Seeing that some of them were awe inspiring, some were thoughtful, some were hesitant and trembling, she sneered and said, "I know that you are not all of one mind. Some of you may be thinking about leaving this room today and selling out this old woman to Jia Lai. Let me say something, cowards, if we succeed this time, it will also save your life. There is no harm to you. If we fail, we won't involve you who are bystanders either. On the other hand, it's the rats who wanted to secretly report this, do you think Jia Lai, that ominous killing star, will consider your goodwill, or will he think that you are too close to us old things who wanted to find death and are suspicious?"

The middle-aged man filled with rage just now jumped up and said, "You are right, Third Madame, I will follow you!"

In these years, the aristocrats of the Eighteen Tribes had been oppressed too much by Jia Lai Ying Huo. The aristocrats hated him, but were also afraid of his cruel and totalitarian policies. At this time, when a leader came out, many angry people immediately followed along.

Madame Hong Xia turned to the chief: "In this matter, even if we wreck our brains thinking, it would still be useless. We have to rely on the chief."

The chief, in front of the eyes of everyone, sat stiffly as if wanting to evaporate for a moment, steaming the whole sunless room into a hazy vapor, and finally bit his teeth and smacked his thigh: "Third Madame give your orders!"

When the country was in danger, there must be bloody conflicts between the parties in power — no matter whether it was Great Liang or the Eighteen Tribes of Heavenly Wolf. Even the foreigners trapped in Jiangnan could not escape this situation of being forced to make changes, this process contains ten parts of danger, a hundred part of chances, taking the next step forward was prosperity, but one step backwards may be the extinction of the country.

At this time, a surging tide pervaded the Eighteen Tribes of the Northern Barbarians, not to mention the aristocrats of big surnames organized their own forces.

The next night, a swallow-like shadow shot up the watchtower of the Eighteen Tribes. It was originally funded by the foreigners, at first, the foreigners were also responsible for the maintenance here. But right now, as the Westerners did not even have enough to take care of themselves, most of the machines on the watchtower have failed, their only one function left were to be decorations.

The guard on the tower had been quietly put down. The man

who jumped up to the watchtower showed his face in the moonlight. It was a quiet little family slave under the account of the chief. He quickly went all the way to the top of the tower, someone was waiting for him.

The 'family slave' stood up and wiped his face to reveal an ever-changing Cao Chun Hua.

Cao Chun Hua said, "It is done. The chief has put sedative in the medicine of Jia Lai."

Chen Qing Xu: "Not poisoning him directly?"

"It won't be so easy," Cao Chun Hua said. "Jia Lai is an expert in poison. If we aren't careful, it would alert him. As for sedative, he would also prepare some to drink occasionally, even if he detected it, it would not be suspicious. There are family members of all noble names in the guards of the king's tent. These people have already been given orders. They intend to work in the night without being aware of and try not to disturb Jia Lai Ying Huo as much as possible, so that he can die in his tent quietly and push the Crown Prince to succeed in the morning. Once it's confirmed that Jia Lai had taken the medicine, the chief will make the sound of the night owl as a signal. We'll just have to wait. Did you inform Marshal's side yet?"

Chen Qing Xu's little silver ball flashed in between her fingers — it was the signal bullet Shen Yi had given her. This little thing had been hidden in her sleeve. Right now, as she had to take it out to use, she suddenly felt reluctant.

Cao Chun Hua was not aware of many of these thoughts, he said with emotion: "A hero of the generation, but all the people under him wanted to rebel against him, they did not even want to hear his last words, how could that be."

"They are too afraid of him," Chen Qing Xu stood on the watchtower and looked at the direction of the king's tent through the *Qian Li Yan* on the bridge of her nose. "I haven't asked you, how did you manage to make Madame Hong Xia stand up as the leader?"

"Madame Hong Xia's son died in the battlefield," Cao Chun Hua

said casually, tucking his hair behind his ear, "Leaving her only one grandson, who is nearly sixteen years old. Jia Lai is extremely vicious. He regulated that all the boys over the age of sixteen in the noble family must join the army.

"I saw her son several times when I sneaked into the Barbarians tribes. The other night, I made a mask and visited his mother for him in his place... Perhaps it was not very similar, but in the dark and dim light, combined with her poor eyesight, it had succeeded.

"Me and her had hugged each other and cried, saying that I could not bear to let the young child walk the same path as his father's. You see, the swelling around my eyes had not dissipated yet, I had to hide it for two days. Miss Chen, do you have any special medicine for swelling?"

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

Cao Chun Hua, shaking his head, said to the moon, "How much tears did I have to shed while I wore the face of someone else's, this is really..."

Chen Qing Xu interrupted him: "Shh — did you hear it?"

In the bleak night, the shrill cry of the owl suddenly sounded — the chief had made his move!

Chen Qing Xu pushed open the window of the watchtower, and a nearly invisible silk thread came out of her fingertips. It fell down from the tower, just enough for her tiptoes to take advantage of the force.

Cao Chun Hua took out a small pot of *Ziliujin* from his arm, poured it from a high place to the watchtower, creating a false image of oil leakage from the tower body, then quickly ignited it. The fierce fire light was like a dragon winding down. For a moment, it reflected the watchtower as bright as day.

Chen Qing Xu took advantage of the fire in the watchtower to toss the signal bullet in her hand into the air. The signal bomb split into two parts and released a flash of white light like lightning. The

white light was very special, it was not dazzling if being seen nearby and was easily covered by the fire of *Ziliujin*, its strong penetrative light could only be recognized from a distance.

Shen Yi, who had been in ambush for a long time, saw it in the Qian Li Yan and jumped up: "Marshal, they had acted!"

Gu Yun made a long whistle. The Black Eagles, like a bat in the night, quickly swept across the ground. Only the sound could be heard and the figures could not be seen.

Shen Yi could not wait anymore and rushed out. But he seemed to remember something and turned back to say to Gu Yun, "Zi Xi, you just came back from Jiangnan yesterday. You have not rested yet. Can you still do it?"

Gu Yun was stunned, then said with a laugh, "My God, how are you so concerned about others? Don't worry about me, go watch over Miss Chen. To be able to witness that Jia Lai at the end of his road is better than any panacea."

There was also the witchcraft hidden by that old lunatic. Gu Yun dared not talk about it, nor look forward to it. But he still wanted to come and have a look by himself.

What if...

"If the Bone of Impurity actually had a cure," Gu Yun thought with determination, *"I'll go to Hu Guo Temple to light those bald donkeys an incense."*

Chen Qing Xu's mobility was unparalleled, immediately disappearing after landing. The rebels of the Eighteen Tribes wanted to make Jia Lai Ying Huo die without a sound, but she did not wish

for him to die without his last word - or else who could they ask about the secret witchcraft?

Cao Chun Hua had to work hard to keep up with her. Halfway there, he suddenly heard the screech of a *Baihong* bowstring.

Cao Chun Hua looked up and saw the fire rising in the south. He knew that the Black Iron Camp had arrived, it won't be long before they directly broke into the Northern Barbarian’s defense line. But as he was distracted just for a moment, Chen Qing Xu's figure was gone.

The guards of the Wolf King's tent seemed ordinary to Chen Qing Xu. That night, a small half of them were also away to plot their scheme. She was able to get in easily, landing behind the Wolf King's flag, she first let a group of soldiers with swords and spears run towards the main tent, then gently stepped down and tailed them without anyone knowing.

The rebels advanced to the main tent without caution, but Chen Qing Xu noticed something was wrong on the way — she knew that there would be less guards in the Wolf King's tent that night, but there was no reason for it to be so lacking.

Chen Qing Xu's heart tightened, the small knife slipped into her hand.

At this time, the rebels have arrived at the main tent of Jia Lai.

Suddenly, there was a light sound in the air. The well-ventilated main tent suddenly opened four doors. Countless bows and arrows and short guns were exposed from the windows. Meanwhile, the ambush bodyguards and hundreds of Barbarian soldiers came from behind and circled the defenseless rebels in the middle.

Chapter 114: Eliminated

T/N:

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In the flow of time, the Heavenly Wolf tribes dark in ink faded just like that and ceased to exist.

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Chen Qing Xu suppressed her breath to the lowest level, almost becoming one with the surrounding plants and trees, hid motionlessly in the dead corner behind the black banner made of thick felt above the king's tent, watching the unexpected development.

The Wolf King's tent was divided into two parts. The steam wheelchair with white fog slid out from the middle. The Wolf King Jia Lai Ying Huo was wrapped in a heavy cloak, crouched in the wheelchair like someone about to die and swept his gaze coldly around the rebels outside.

"Third Aunt," he said with a smile on his thin, cracked lips, muttering, "My mother died early. You once took care of me for five years, treated me like your own son, but now...even you would want to point your sword at me?"

Although Madame Hong Xia was the initiator, she was a faltering old woman. She could devise plans and could not come into battle herself. As she was not here, Jia Lai’s monologue scattered in the air, with no destination and receiver, with no one to answer.

The ferocious Wolf King of the last generation - whether it was his hatred and vengeance or joy and happiness, whether it was his ambition for hegemony or the never-ending path for revenge, he was always all alone — his parents, brothers, children, relatives and friends, he did not have any. He treated the tribes people like pigs and dogs, they also betrayed him as payment.

Some of the rebels' hands were shaking violently and could hardly hold their swords. No one knew whose sword fell on the

ground. In the quiet night, the sound echoed clearly.

"Everyone betrayed me, wanted me to die." Jia Lai gave a sharp sneer, suddenly raising his claw-like hand up high and chopped down, "Then you all go die first!"

At his command, arrows were shot from the king's tent. Surrounded by two sides, it was impossible for the rebels to avoid it and had to fight back.

This assassination, which should have been quiet, immediately turned into a bloody battle. The whole Eighteen Tribes were alerted. The Heavenly Wolf metropolis became noisy and chaotic. Some ran to the watchtower to extinguish the fire, some were busy assisting the king to pacify the rebellion, and some bravely joined the rebel army, but the majority were at a loss as to how to react.

The Crown Prince and the chief steward were pushed out with their hands tied up. The chief steward had wet his pants and looked at the frightened Crown Prince with despair. He said to himself, "*The Wolf King only had this one child left. Maybe he would be lenient towards him. But the same could not be said of me*."

With such thoughts, his face immediately changed from desperation and fear to determination, he clenched his teeth, his eyes appeared as if they would crack open, a moment later, his face suddenly turned blue, his body went stiff and fell down headfirst under the public's eyes — the chief had bit the poison bag in his mouth, committing suicide.

Cao Chun Hua was frightened to death. He did expect that the assassination might not go well, but it didn't matter, for as long as most of the Northern Barbarians were in disorder, Gu Yun could easily take advantage of the situation. When the mantis catches cicadas, whether the mantis wins or the cicada wins, there were always yellow finches waiting behind.

But he didn't foresee that Chen Qing Xu to roll to the center of the storm first!

In a twinkling of an eye, the battle between the rebels and the

bodyguards near the king's tent was almost at its climax. At this moment, a Barbarian suddenly rushed into the king's tent: "Report - enemy attack! There is an enemy attack!"

This sentence was like a stone creating a thousand layers of waves. For a moment, there was silence near the king's tent where people were clashing. The captain of the guard set aside the rest of the people and ran to Jia Lai Ying Huo quickly: "My King, someone set fire on the watchtower. A large number of 'ghost crows' along the border took advantage of the chaotic situation to fish in troubled waters and rushed to this side!"

Jia Lai's eyes twitched a few times, a hint of joy seemed to appear on his face: "Who is coming? Is it Gu Yun?"

The head of the guard broke out in a sweat. He did not know what's to be so happy about with Gu Yun coming.

At the next moment, he was shocked to see Jia Lai's claw-like hands gripping the handrail of the steam wheelchair with all their strength, he let out a low shout, this person who had been paralyzed for half a year actually stood up by some miracle!

Chief bodyguard: "My King!"

"Gu Yun, Gu Yun..." Jia Lai called out in a low voice, his eyes were frighteningly bright as if his soul was burning, they could not help but have deep doubts about the previous rumors — perhaps the deceased goddess was not his obsession, but Gu Yun.

"Bring my armor!" shouted Jia Lai.

The chief bodyguard has never seen such a strange way of finding death. For a while, he thought he had misheard: "My King,... What did you say?"

"My armor!" Jia Lai roared, "My armor!"

The captain was frightened by his face that seemed to be on the verge of bursting and staggered for a few steps. He did not dare to neglect and sent someone to bring over the Wolf King's Heavy Armor.

The iron monster of snow color as tall as nearly two people were carried over by four men and was placed on the ground with a loud thud. Jia Lai Ying Huo was shivering like leaves in the autumn wind. His thin and dried hand grabbed the edge of the steel armor, dragging his heavy steps, slowly putting himself inside.

The Heavy Armor was self-contained and supported by a steel frame. It's much easier to operate than Light Armor, but it's not so easy to the point that any half-paralyzed person could control it.

Jia Lai's face reddened as he climbed into the Heavy Armor. He opened the steam valve at his feet with a gnash of his teeth. The strong mechanism roared as it started. The back of the Heavy Armor spewed out the arrogant steam, about to burst out roaring.

...But the person inside was no longer the mighty hero who ate meat and drank blood in the past.

Just after lifting his legs, Jia Lai was already at the end of the line. It was difficult to maintain balance for longer. With a loud noise, the Heavy Armor tilted. The object of hundreds of kilograms smashed a deep hole in the ground.

The bodyguard was frightened, "My King!"

At that moment, no one could see the look on the face of Jia Lai, the Wolf King. The thin man with only a skeleton left was hiding in the nearly towering steel armor, like a shriveled insect in a walnut. In everyone's heart — even his enemies, at that moment, clearly witnessed the words ‘a hero's end’.

Even if he was a lunatic devoid of any conscience.

At that moment, the unique bird-like sound of a Black Eagle was getting closer and closer. The Black Iron Camp was extremely mobile. Their struggle in the previous days was only due to the Eighteen Tribes risking their lives and burning *Ziliujin*, otherwise, they would not be allowed to survive until now.

At this time, the metropolis was in chaos, the Black Iron’s three factions advanced with little to no resistance. The Black Eagles opens

the way, like a black whirlwind rolling over.

The chief bodyguard hurriedly took apart the Heavy Armor and carried out Jia Lai miserably trapped in it: "My King, I'm afraid it is impossible to protect metropolis this night. We will escort you to leave first..."

Jia Lai laid on the captain's back with a dazed look. After a while, he reached forward and pointed, "Over there."

Chen Qin Xu dodged a flowing arrow from nowhere. A thought popped up in her head. She then quickly came down from behind the floating black flag. A small silver needle flew out of her hand, killing several Barbarians who happened to be nearby quietly, then chased after them in secret.

A team of bodyguards rushed away quickly, escorted Jia Lai to the west side of the Wolf King's tent, running further and further away from the crowd. In the end, there was almost no place left to hide in all four sides. Chen Qing Xu followed them with difficulty, risked being found, and tailed behind the group of bodyguards. She chased after Jia Lai for two minutes and found that she had followed them to a deserted altar.

The altar was extremely magnificent. The whole building almost pierced the clouds. It was all made of stones, almost resembling a palace.

The gate was carved out of large stones, the entrance was covered with thick felt, countless mottled and unknown characters and symbols were engraved on it. The surrounding had been overgrown with weeds, without a trace of humans for a long time. A crow was startled and flew up to the sky with its herd, the flapping of their wings ring out.

Chen Qing Xu was not the only one who did not understand the reason, the guards also looked at each other in confusion.

Since the goddess of the Eighteen Tribes became a joke, no one had set foot to the altar anymore.

Jia Lai shook off the captain's arm and said, "Step back!"

The captain of the guard was stunned for a moment and retreated a few steps away.

Jia Lai slowly knelt down. His knees were stiff, almost falling over as he knelt. The chief bodyguard hurriedly came forward to help him but was slapped away: "Get away! Get out of the way! "

The captain of the guard retreated to one side.

It took Jia Lai a lot of effort to kneel steadily. His bent back was stretched as straight as possible, he put his hands in front of his chest, the color of anger and humiliation on his face was slowly fading, his expression slowly turning calm again.

After a while, he struggled to keep his kneeling posture and climbed forward for a few steps, like a dying old dog. The chief bodyguard was already beaten and dared not go forward for more. He could only watch him crawl up at a loss.

Jia Lai climbed to the side of the huge stone gate, lifted the torn up felt, and fumbled on the uneven mantra. Chen Qing Xu realized that the ruined altar of the goddess might be the important key. She approached carefully and stared at Jia Lai's movement without blinking.

Suddenly, he pushed something down and thrust his arm forward.

The ground immediately vibrated violently, the guards all turned pale with fright. But Chen Qing Xu flew past it without hesitation.

The stones around the altar moved by themselves, one huge gear wheel after another rose from the ground. Countless steel pipes with rusty skin stretched out in all directions, they closed and connected by themselves and finally became a complete circle. All the iron pipes

were buckled, making a hiss. Countless small pieces of iron spread out from both sides, moving slightly in the breeze. They were actually small fire wings — this thing was very similar to the ‘Kite’ of Great Liang.

The whole altar was like a Giant Kite. Chen Qing Xu had a kind of illusion, that if Ziliujin were to be burnt, it will rise to the sky.

She thought in shock, "*That year, was it not because the Barbarians didn't have their own fire engine technology that they were defeated by the Black Iron Camp? What is this? Do this Barbarian man want to escape or rise to the sky with this thing?*"

Just before she came to a conclusion, the truth had proven itself. There was no problem with her common sense. A snapping sound was heard and suddenly, there was a smell of smoke coming from a pipe in a circle.

Then, a series of breaking noises rang out one after another. The gurgling *Ziliujin* that had been kept underground for many years had been mixed with many impurities. The open fire under the fire wing flickered out, and a choking scent different from the burning of pure *Ziliujin* spread out.

Describing it was slow, but actually, from the first breakage to the burning of the entire altar, it's only a blink of an eye. If there were experts in the field like Ge Chen or Zhang Feng Han present, they would be able to see that the structure of the altar that looked like a Giant Kite was not complete at all. In fact, it only copied the flaming wings and golden box in the shape of pipes of the Kite, while the most critical factor that decides whether the Giant Kite could fly up or not was completely neglected. Even if it was forced to rise by flaming wings, it would disintegrate before it reached the mid air level.

Combined with the lack of maintenance in a long time, it had obviously aggravated this kind of damage. Before it lifted off, it had already self-destructed.

The Giant Kite buried under the altar of the goddess praying to the heavens for longevity, seemed to predict the unreachable dream

of the Heavenly Wolf tribes which fate was at its end, forever could not be realized.

The chief bodyguard was frightened and shouted, "My King! Get out of the way! "

As if shaken by his voice, the stone gate carved from the huge stone suddenly collapsed, crushing a large number of pipes that had already risen from the ground. The gas produced by the burning of *Ziliujin* expanded rapidly. After a deafening bang, the altar started to explode. A huge fireball rose to the sky. Jia Lai was in the middle of the fire, looking back at his team of guards, surprisingly, there was no fear on his face.

At that moment, Chen Qing Xu suddenly understood that Jia Lai was not necessarily unaware that once the altar was lit, it would blow up.

...He was willing, scheming for a long time, he was only looking for a more brilliant way to die.

The outer wall of the altar began to crumble and was about to collapse.

Chen Qing Xu clenched her teeth and decided to take a risk, grabbed a crack in the full view of everyone and followed Jia Lai in.

Then *boom!,* the altar wall collapsed.

Cao Chun Hua lost Chen Qing Xu’s trace. There was no other way, he had to stay and assisted Gu Yun, until the Black Iron Camp moved into the metropolis and he learned the general direction of Jia Lai Ying Huo from the captive Barbarian guards.

Cao Chun Hua was very familiar with the northern part of the metropolis. Knowing that he must have gone to the altar of the

goddess, he led Shen Yi over immediately in anxiety, who knew that they would arrive in time to see such a scene.

Cao Chun Hua's pupils shriveled, he could not even let out a shout.

However, Shen Yi did not hesitate to remove the Light Armor from his body, making use of his surroundings, rolled a circle in the ice and snow that had not been melted yet in this incredibly cold place. Mixed in all the ice and snow, he bravely rushed into the fire.

The brilliant end of the Wolf King's own choice made the chief bodyguard surrounded stood still in shock. A group of elite Barbarian bodyguards stood in place like wooden posts, with no intention to resist. They had become captives without any trouble.

The Ziliujin with too many impurities did not have the power of melting the ice field, but created a lot of smoke that people couldn't open their eyes. A layer of ash soon gathered on the Qian Li Yan, it was pulled down and thrown aside by Chen Qing Xu.

She saw that at the moment Jia Lai fell out of the Heavy Armor, he probably already wanted to die. For a person who was eager to die, it's not very useful to force a confession by torture — not to mention she did not know how to force it.

She had been searching for the secret of witchcraft for many years. *Will it be in this mysterious altar?*

Chen Qing Xu passed through the collapsing altar and found the shadow of Jia Lai struggling to climb forward in the black ash. The higher one was during a fire, the more difficult it would be to breathe. It would be easier to walk on the ground. Jia Lai won't be suffocated for a while. Chen Qing Xu covered her mouth and nose, squinted at his direction, and found that Jia Lai was blind to the loud noise around him. His eyes were fixed on the big stone platform in

the middle of the altar.

What's in the stone platform?

At this time, a big beam column in the altar collapsed on top of Chen Qing Xu's head. She had to dodge, borrowed some force on the gravel, she then flew to the stone platform.

If the earliest designer wanted to make the whole altar into a big kite, according to the location of the stone platform, it should be a central pillar much like a mast. There was a circle of stone plates engraved with Barbarian characters on the platform, they were different from those unknown incantations at the door — this was the real language of the Eighteen Tribes.

When Chen Qing Xu first came to the Northern Frontier to look for the witchcraft and poison, she had also put in some effort to learn the Man language, she could somewhat understand that what was written on them were the history of the separation and integration of the Eighteen Tribes.

From beginning to end, there was no mention of the witchcraft of the Barbarians. Chen Qing Xu was finally choked by the smoke and coughed fiercely. She was very disheartened — was this really just the remains of an altar site? There was nothing that she was looking for here?

At this time, another unknown part had blown up again. After the ground shook, a big stone plate opposite her suddenly fell down.

Chen Qing Xu: "..."

While in bad luck, one could get choked even when drinking water.

She instinctively backed away, but after all, the smoke was blocking her sight. Chen Qing Xu stepped on air, her whole body fell directly down the stone platform. Perhaps this time, she would truly get squished under the stone!

In a hurry, the rope hidden in Chen Qing Xu's sleeve shot out. She didn't know what it had wrapped around on the stone platform. She

coughed hard while struggling to pull herself up. Unexpectedly, the thing she caught onto was not stable, falling down as soon as she pulled slightly.

Chen Qing Xu's heart sank: "*It's over*."

Just then, a figure rushed over, hugging her and rolled to the side. There was a loud explosive noise next to them. The big stone board fell from the air stirred up gust of wind. Chen Qing Xu was stained with the mud on the altar floor. She still had not come out of her fright, raising her head in astonishment as she saw a worn down and miserable looking General Shen.

Shen Yi angrily pulled up her collar: "Do you want to find death?"

Chen Qing Xu was stunned by his roar, her eyes open wide.

As soon as Shen Yi met her eyes, he immediately counseled, his rage was also extinguished. He bent down to pick up the rope in her sleeve and said, "Let's go first... What is this!"

Chen Qing Xu's rope with a hook was wrapped around a strange ‘object’ about the size of one person. At first glance, it looked like a stone statue, it was unknown whether it's hollow or what, but it was very light. Shen Yi pulled it gently. The rope unraveled, revealing a head.

It was a lifelike statue of a woman, with her eyes closed, her face peaceful and gentle.

Shen Yi looked at the unique ‘stone statue’ with exquisite craftsmanship and was inexplicably covered in goosebumps.

Chen Qing Xu glanced at it first, then was surprised. She squatted down and brushed away the dust on the surface of the ‘stone statue’. Under the dust, there was a white base and was soft to the touch.

"It's human skin." Chen Qing Xu murmured.

Shen Yi thought his ears were infected by Gu Yun's deafness: "What?"

Chen Qing Xu looked up and saw that there was a secret gap behind the fallen stone slab of the collapsed stone platform, and this beauty… no one knew dead or alive was originally hidden in the middle.

Was Jia Lai actually coming for this human skin?

Chen Qing Xu was confused for a while, she had to follow her instinct and bent over to pick up the thing wrapped in white silk.

Shen Yi hurriedly stepped in, "Let me! Go!"

He picked up the statue, dragged Chen Qing Xu up, and ran out of the altar.

There were explosions everywhere, smoke everywhere, and in the rolling fire, a faint and hoarse voice broke out intermittently: "The cleanest spirit,... the wind also wanted to kiss...her skirt..."

All the huge stone pillars of the whole altar collapsed into a line. When the two were about to escape, they only heard a loud noise. A cluster of huge flames with purple light rose high. The central pillar held by seven or eight people fell to one side. The whole altar was finally unsustainable and the huge roof collapsed.

Shen Yi's face was ashen, he couldn't breathe at all. Suddenly, his heart was in despair, he felt that he might have to perish here today. Suddenly, he put the humanoid thing in his hand into Chen Qing Xu's arms, put the Wind Slasher on his back, arched his back, and tried to protect the person by his side with his body.

Chen Qing Xu was shocked. For a moment, she didn't know what her heart was feeling.

At this time, the howl of Black Eagles came from the sky with a creaking sound. Shen Yi looked up in amazement, only to see a group of Black Eagle was throwing out the ropes as thick as an arm in their iron claws, prevented the top of the toppling altar from falling.

Gu Yun arrived!

Shen Yi didn't dare to hesitate. He didn't care about the gravel

that fell on him. He protected Chen Qing Xu and rushed out with all he had.

Just as their front feet left the altar, the steel rope in the hand of a Black Eagle suddenly broke, a Black Cavalry in front dragged them away quickly.

At the moment when the steel rope broke, Gu Yun almost rushed into the sea of fire directly, but when he saw the two rolling out in the smoke, he pulled back the reins, pacifying the nearly frightened horse, and let out a sigh of relief.

Then he blew a long whistle, making a gesture to the Black Eagles in the sky and the Black Cavalry on the ground: "Withdraw!"

Jia Lai Ying Huo's faint singing voice could no longer be heard.

The towering altar of the Eighteen Tribes for hundreds of years was destroyed, the thick smoke rolled up to the sky of eternal life.

The strong wind blew away half of the burnt Wolf banner, whistling out and into the flames and dust.

In the flow of time, the Heavenly Wolf tribes dark in ink faded just like that and ceased to exist.

Yet, Ziliujin was still burning.

Chapter 115: Overturn

—

Take one palm and send it to Jiangbei, to measure the width of the other's waist for me.

—

"I feel that this face is a little familiar." Gu Yun held a wooden stick and looked at the 'woman' on the ground for a while, then concluded.

The Wolf King's tent of Jia Lai Ying Huo was turned upside down by the people of Black Iron Camp. They found that there were neither rare pearls nor corals in it. It looked magnificent but actually was deep in poverty. It could be seen that before he wiped clean the aristocrats' property, he also did the same to himself. He was really a selfless lunatic.

To Gu Yun's great disappointment, they couldn't find the goddess's witchcraft in legend.

Thinking about it, only Great Liang people liked to write everything on paper and assemble it into a book. There were many primitive customs in the Eighteen Tribes, things that need to be recorded were likely to be engraved on stone, tortoise shell and leather, or simply passed down by mouth. The witchcraft they were looking for might be hidden only in Jia Lai's brain and was already burned to ashes.

Finally, only such a strange figure was brought back to the northern garrison under the insistence of Chen Qing Xu.

"What did Miss Chen say about this thing just now?" Gu Yun asked the soldier, "What kind of statue?"

"Soul statue," the soldier replied, seeing Gu Yun poking it back and forth with a wooden stick without any taboo, he couldn't help saying, "Marshal, I think this thing is very insidious. Perhaps there is something not clean about it. You should stay away from it."

The 'soul statue' was life-sized, but it weighed only around ten to

fifteen kilograms. After cleaning, the face and skin were no different from a real person at first sight, as if it could talk after opening its eyes.

It was said that this was not a complete piece of human skin. It was made from the best skin of many young boys and girls. After being treated with some kind of voodoo, it formed a whole piece and was wrapped around the wood that was carved into a complete human shape in advance. When the human skin and the wood were closely pasted together, it could create a lifelike dummy.

The Eighteen Tribes believed that this kind of soul statue could summon the souls of the children that had died in foreign countries.

At first, the soul statue was covered with dust. After being washed, it completely resembled a nude living person. Shen Yi thought it was too unorthodox and asked people to find clothes for it to 'wear'.

Gu Yun stared at the closed eyes of the soul statue. He felt that it slightly resembled Chang Geng when he was a child. He reached out his fingers and stroked his chin, tried to search his memory and asked, "You say what it summoned was the soul of the Barbarian royal consort that year?"

The soldier believed in demons and did not dare to look much, he said in fright: "Marshal, we better move it away quickly, this thing is scarily demonic..."

"It's alright," Gu Yun said casually, glancing at the face of the soul statue. "I think that she still looks very pretty."

Soldier: "..."

Recently, Marshal Gu had to take care of both battlefields north and south, perhaps he had lost his mind from exhaustion.

At this time, Chen Qing Xu, who was not feeling reassured and went to see Shen Yi, barged in suddenly: "I remember now!"

Gu Yun: "Huh?"

Chen Qing Xu drew out a knife and knelt on the ground. Under the

eyes of Gu Yun and his superstitious soldier, she cut the soul statue open from the chest.

Gu Yun: "..."

His soldier trembled with fear, turned his back and recited 'Amitabha'. Gu Yun looked at him, then at Miss Chen, who was like a butcher. He reached out and handed the stick to his silent soldier and said pitifully, "Take it to ward off evil spirits and defend yourself."

Chen Qing Xu ignored the surroundings and concentrated on the point of the knife. The human skin looked flat and even very soft outside. There was no flesh and blood inside after cutting open. The two sides were separated cleanly. The texture was like tanned leather. Chen Qing Xu had a good grasp of her strength, only cutting the human skin and did not affect the wood below.

Gu Yun was sitting around doing nothing at first, then suddenly, he narrowed his eyes, pulled up his sleeve and squatted down to gently lift the skin up without any hesitation, touching the wood surface.

The soldier's face was green, hurriedly confessed his sins, took the stick given by the Marshal and ran outside to watch the door.

Gu Yun felt around for a long time, wondering, "Why, there are still words on this wood?"

Chen Qing Xu had cut open the human skin from head to toe, like peeling an egg shell. Changing into a smaller knife, she carefully took the human skin off one by one until the whole section of the human shaped wood was exposed. She took time to respond to Gu Yun's words: "Yes, but it's carved small and shallow. Only people with extremely sharp sense of touch will be able to feel it. If ordinary people want to see, I'm afraid it is only with the help of tools, would Marshal help me read what was written on it?"

The Black Iron Camp and the Eighteen Tribes have been enemies of two generations. Many senior generals in the Black Iron Camp knew the common words of the Man language. Gu Yun fumbled for a moment on the neck of the humanoid wood and hesitated for a long time before responding: "It's all very strange words, cooking what... I

don't know, there's a number... Ah, it seems that there's something else about sunlight... "

Gu Yun looked at Chen Qing Xu in confusion: "Why is there a mysterious cooking tutorial engraved on this soul statue? Eh... Miss Chen, what's the matter?"

Gu Yun had never seen such an excited look on Chen Qing Xu's face. Her cold eyes were almost full of tears.

As if never seeing wood before, she picked up the humanoid wood with her hands, took out a silk and carefully wiped off the dust on it, as if holding a rare treasure.

"For the soul statue to bring back the spirits of other countries, it needs to communicate life and death. The usual way is to hide a personal item of the person inside the wood. But if this method was used to call on the soul, the deceased are usually thousands of miles away, most of the burial place could not be found. So their personal item can't be obtained every time. I just remembered, in this case, the caster will generally replace it by the last words left by the dead or the inscriptions that can represent the dead. "

"In those days, the Barbarian sisters fled from the deep palace. On the way, the elder sister died in a foreign country. The younger sister fled with her sister's child to a bandit's den. Before the death of the imperial concubine, she left one very important thing to Hu Ge Er. Later, it passed through Hu Ge Er's hands and finally fell into the hands of Jia Lai the Wolf King..."

Gu Yun heard this, his heart started beating like mad.

"It is the secret art of the goddess." Chen Qing Xu pointed out what he was thinking in his heart, "I... I only thought of this possibility, I did not expect for it to be true... "

Everyone's impression of the 'Barbarian goddess' was only the image of the madwoman Hu Ge Er, while the existence of the royal consort was very faint. She died too early, from the high grassland 'demigod' reduced to a consort trapped inside the palace of many layers, with nine gates locked tight. Whether she felt resentment and hatred, or

acceptance of her fate, there was no way of knowing now.

But what was the consort's attitude towards her own child?

It must have been hatred according to common sense. Even when Jia Lai saw Chang Geng's face that closely resembled the goddess sisters when he was young, he couldn't help but feel murderous, let alone the party involved?

However, the witchcraft of the Eighteen Tribes was so deep and unpredictable that even the Chen's family had been at a loss for many years. As its inheritor, the imperial concubine, if she wanted to kill a fetus that had not yet formed, she could do so without anyone knowing. Then for what reason did she keep the child?

Did she know that the child would eventually be made into the Bone of Impurity by the insane Hu Ge Er?

The traces of the older generation had vanished from the world. No one would ever know whether the Barbarian goddess decided to keep the child in her because of a mother's unwillingness, or just knew that Hu Ge Er was pregnant with another child, and fueled by the resentment in her, she planned to create an incomparable evil god.

However, in any case, it was also the soul statue of the goddess that left a ray of hope for Chang Geng's life.

This was almost as mysterious as the karmic circle.

Chen Qing Xu didn't want to discuss about karma, this piece of wood was all that was in her mind right now. Without waiting for Gu Yun to react, she held it and ran away, not caring to even pick up the silk fallen on the ground.

Gu Yun was in a daze for a long time. He slowly exhaled a breath in his lungs, this unspeakable hope hit him in the center of his chest. When he stood up, the front of his eyes was almost dark, it took a long time to wear off but his ears were still ringing.

He reached out his hand and rubbed his chin uncontrollably, trying to display a normal and serious face as much as possible. His brows unconsciously wrinkled together, but the corner of his mouth lifted

up uncontrollably. The serious and uncontrollable joy interwoven into a standard expression of 'neither laughing nor crying'. Even Gu Yun felt that his image at this time might appear a little insane.

At this time, General Shen's personal soldier next door was outside the tent, poking his head in looking around for a moment and asking, "Is Doctor Chen finally gone?"

"Yes," Gu Yun heard his own soldier replied "Why? Is there something up?"

The soldier who inquired about the whereabouts of the miracle doctor shook his head and ran back to report.

At the next moment, Gu Yun heard a painful cry from General Shen's tent that he didn't know how long he had been holding in.

Shen Yi's back was both wounded and burnt. It was very miserable, but he still refused Miss Chen's treatment and visit. He had locked Miss Chen outside his tent several times when she came, determined not to let her see his tattered appearance. He also resolutely found a military doctor who was good at killing pigs to deal with the wound. During that time, he had sent someone to spy for four or five times and endured until Chen Qing Xu left, finally letting go and crying out all he wanted.

Gu Yun listened for a while, only to find that not even the pain of giving birth would not sound so miserable. Not having the heart to hear this, he picked up the silk that had fallen on the ground, shook the dust off it, went out and stuffed it to his little soldier and said, "Give it to General Shen quickly, for pain relief."

It didn't matter where the silk was rubbed on previously, its efficiency was immediate. As soon as the thing was delivered, Shen Yi's howl became much lower.

Gu Yun, bored of using his brother as entertainment, turned back to the Marshal tent, planned to reply to a dozen war reports and a pile of letters from the major garrison. Only when he started writing did he find that he completely could not calm down.

Every word in the war report was understood, but they could not string into one sentence in succession to jump into his eyes. For a while, he thought aimlessly, "*Could it be that there was only a record of the practice but not the antidote?*"

Later he thought, "*That doesn't matter. As long as there's a clue of the Bone of Impurity, the Chen family can always come up with a way*."

Then after a while, he said to himself, "*Do I really have to go burn incense for those donkeys in Hu Guo Temple? Damn it...*"

...All kinds of thoughts twisting and turning, with no way out.

But among all these thoughts, an indescribable yearning broke out a bloody path, jumping into his heart.

A drop of ink on the tip of his pen fell down. At last, he came back to his senses. He simply pushed away all the official duties, took out the letter papers like a fool, and began to occupy the official business time for personal love affair.

In April, flowers in the land of Liangjiang were about to wilt, long rain evaporated from the river.

For more than a month, Chang Geng had been staying put in Jiangbei. He first organized the funeral of General Zhong, then Fang Qin wrote to Emperor Long An and requested to keep *Yan Wang* in his place to assist the court emissary in promoting contact with the Westerners.

Although *Yan Wang* had stepped down from politics, Fang Qin still felt that him staying in the capital was like a bone stuck in his throat.

Logically, a snake must be beaten in the head, political opponents must be quickly eliminated. But the reason why *Yan Wang* resigned was not planned by Fang Qin himself, the whole thing was not under his control, and with *Yan Wang*'s identity, it was very difficult to deal

with. Apart from rebellion, there was really nothing that could kill him anymore.

Fang Qin had to find ways to let him stay far away.

The word 'assist' was very amazing, meaning that this matter was not led by *Yan Wang*, he only had the obligations but no power. If it succeeded, the credit belongs to the envoys. But if something goes wrong, there were many rooms to pour mud on *Yan Wang*.

It's a pity that god didn't meet people's wishes. The troubles Fang Qin hoped to see didn't appear - *Yan Wang* in Jiangbei was like a fish in water, he was already very well liked, plus the bond from fighting side by side with all the soldiers and had the guarantee of General Zhong and Gu Yun.

The envoys sent by the imperial court had sharp eyes. When they arrived in Jiangbei, they all followed the lead of *Yan Wang* without fail. In addition, Gu Yun also sent many letters in his daily life, even came to have a look every ten days. The bullying of the Westerners along the banks of Liangjiang was going very smoothly. During that time, they fought three or four small naval battles, gaining benefits and trained the soldiers. Li Feng could not say anything, on the contrary, he even felt a little bit sorry for *Yan Wang*.

At the same time, another unexpected thing happened, making Fang Qin unable to free up his energy to take the opportunity to insert his forces into Liangjiang--

The first batch of Feng Huo tickets were due, they had to pay them back.

The status of the first batch of Feng Huo tickets was very special. It could be said that it was the resurrection medicine for the Great Liang Dynasty. At that time, if it wasn't for this batch of materials that supported Gu Yun's victory in the Western Region, it was only a matter of time before the Westerners besieged the capital again under the heavy pressure of the northern battlefield and the *Ziliujin* stock of the country being exhausted.

The country owed the first batch of people who bought the tickets

greatly, on a logical and emotional aspect, they must repay this debt. If the court could not pay, it would not only be dishonesty, but it would be certain that the Feng Huo tickets will no longer be able to sell in the future. The government's order 'Feng Huo tickets will be equally priced with gold and silver, and merchants are not allowed to reject them' that *Yan Wang* implemented with difficulty would also be in vain.

In this way, even if others agreed, those officials who had bought a large number of Feng Huo tickets in the early days of the official reform for the sake of their black hats would not be able to sit still either.

Until now, Fang Qin had to admit that although *Yan Wang* used a fierce means to kill the political enemies with a knife, carried a reform knife to try to gouge out the meat of others, even offended a large number of people. However, he had soon planted a seed - tying the entire court onto his felonious boat whether it be friend or foe.

According to the original plan of the Grand Council, the first batch of Feng Huo tickets would have a follow-up plan at the beginning of the sale: the third batch of Feng Huo tickets would come out just one month before the expiration date. According to past experience, they could be sold nearly 70 to 80 percent in a month. Some of the money raised would be reserved for the repayment of the first batch of debts, there were plenty in both time and money.

But no one expected that when *Yan Wang* left, the merchants of all sizes would not cooperate!

Fang Qin knew that the thirteen tycoons were standing by *Yan Wang*'s side in private, but Great Liang was vast, except those who were ambitious to participate in politics, did no one else wanted to do business? And then there were those officials who risked their lives to climb up. Each province could have a set amount, it would be very easy to raise this money.

But he had underestimated the merchant alliance.

This was pushed forward by the God of Wealth in the post-war period under the instruction of *Yan Wang*. There were merchant group in

various industries, and all merchant groups formed a large alliance. Although members were bound by the alliance, they also enjoyed the benefits, not to mention the special benefits of buying and selling with other members. It's mainly that in the chaotic time with rampaging bandits, if there's a copy of the alliance, they could ask for the protection of the local government garrison. This was the special benefit the court had given to the first batch of thirteen tycoons who bought the Feng Huo tickets, Du Wan Quan generously shared this.

Many merchants gradually found it's not a bad thing to accept restrictions. With the logo of the merchant alliance, the trust of buyers also increased by a lot, plus they no longer have to fall into the price war with those inferior merchants who sold false goods.

This merchant alliance network soon spread to the whole country, and maybe there would be various problems in the next decades, but at this time, at the beginning of its establishment, the loyalty of its members was very high, becoming an iron plate in front of Fang Qin.

The birth of the third batch of Feng Huo tickets was already hindered at the very beginning. Except for some officials who were eager for quick success and instant profits, they could hardly sell any. The merchant alliance's inexplicable lack of cooperation caused many doubts in people's mind. The old foxes in the court who kept their eyes on the wind pushing the responsibilities back and forth.

But neither inducement nor coercion could be done. The group of new upstarts promoted by the thirteen tycoons had already stabilized, it was not easy to move them anymore.

The Feng Huo ticket was carried out by the Grand Council, but the Grand Council was only responsible for distribution. All the money that came in and out were from the Ministry of Household. Fang Qin wished he could force the bunch in his party to overturn their pockets, but it was only a grain of salt in the sea. Not to mention that whether the noble families were willing to pay for it, even if they were and would pay such a large sum of money without blinking, the poor people of the two houses who could even scold *Yan Wang* would certainly come together again and would not stop until they upturn the root.

As the days for payment approached, even Li Feng could not sit still, asking several times in person. In just three or four days, the amount of time he called Fang Qin and the Grand Council into the palace for a scolding would be seven or eight if not ten times. Finally, the pressure was too great to withstand, the six departments had to join hands with the Grand Council to ask *Yan Wang* to return to the court.

When the government order arrived in Jiangbei, Chang Geng received the order very calmly, then arranged the military affairs handover in an orderly manner, and kept to the attitude of 'not caring about winning or losing'. As if he was in no hurry to come back at all, when the second urgent order arrived, he leisurely packed his bags and prepared to go north.

Just as he was about to leave, the news of the great victory in the Northern Frontier arrived.

For a while, the whole of Jiangbei was boiling. Chang Geng listened to the cheers and shouts and took the letters from the messenger.

Some of Gu Yun's letters to Chang Geng were pure private letters, some were advising Yan Wang about business. Chang Geng was very experienced. He knew whether it was public or private when he touched the envelope with his hand before opening. Gu Yun's business letter was usually a thin piece of paper, with only a few words. He was a little disappointed when he received the letter from the Black Eagle messenger, because it was very thin at the touch, perhaps there would be no private words.

Chang Geng ordered the Black Eagle: "Perhaps Marshal Gu's side is still unaware. I'm leaving for the capital today. I've finished handing over the duties in Jiangbei. Please let him know after you return."

Then he opened the letter in front of the crowd.

There was really only one piece of paper inside, a hand was drawn on it. Gu Yun wrote a line: "*Take one palm and send it to Jiangbei, to measure the width of the other's waist for me*."

Everyone in confusion looked at Yan Wang, not knowing what he was reading that took so long, then his face reddened.

Chapter 116: Running Fast

T/N: 🚃🚃🚃🚃🚃

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When the first steam railcar roared away...

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In the ninth year of Long An, Jia Lai Ying Huo died. The Crown Prince succeeded to the throne and officially announced their surrender on behalf of the Eighteen Tribes. The new Wolf King relinquished his royal title, knelt on his knees and kowtowed to the Emperor's decree. The whole Eighteen Tribes with a small population and sparse land were incorporated into the northernmost province of Shuobei of Great Liang. All the surrendered nobles were controlled by the governor of Shuobei.

At this time, the Eighteen Tribes no longer paid tribute to the imperial court and was integrated into the general tax revenue. The vast *Ziliujin* fields would be mined and transported by the special institution established by the imperial court.

The whole country of Great Liang celebrated.

Shen Yi stayed for the time being to hand over the duties, while Gu Yun had to return to the capital for his report. Cao Niangzi joined him. Chen Qing Xu had just made a copy of the complete secret art of the goddess, but she still has not digested it yet, she also bid farewell to return to the Chen family.

Before leaving, Gu Yun called her to one side. At first, he wanted to ask if there was a certain possibility that there would be an antidote. Later, he thought it was an unnecessary question. Chen Qing Xu, a responsible person, would never confirm it beforehand. At most, she would say *'I will try my best'*. In this way, there was nothing else to say. In the end, he thanked Chen Qing Xu very solemnly and added: "Everything depended on Miss Chen."

Chen Qing Xu did not dare to accept the courtesy, breaking the norm and explained to Gu Yun: "In these two days, Xiao Cao had helped me translate a lot. There is no division between sorcery and poisons in the secret arts of the goddess. Many strange and unimaginable practices are only rituals, which ones are really meaningful and which are nonsense, it is difficult for me to say for certain right now. Marshal, please give me some time."

Gu Yun hurriedly said no trouble.

Chen Qing Xu took out a sealed envelope again and advised: "These are all nourishing prescriptions. It is not effective if taken only once or twice but had to rely on time to slowly nourish. Marshal's body had lost too much, it is still better than nothing. The drug you normally use must be controlled no matter what."

Gu Yun nodded and put it away. Looking up, he caught a glimpse of Shen Yi over the other side with longing eyes.

Shen Yi glared at him. Gu Yun had known him for so many years. For the first time, he found out that Shen Ji Ping's eyes could be expressive enough to scold people, he clearly saw from those eyes the anger of '*Where do you two find so many words to say?'*.

Gu Yun took a look at him and thought to himself, "*You are doing this to yourself. Are you expecting the woman who was naturally born quiet to initiate a conversation with you? There are wastes every year, but there are especially many this year.*"

The two men fought for a moment with their eyes across the air. Finally, Shen Yi could not help but come over. First, he said to Gu Yun unhappily, "It's time to go, Marshal. Don't be late."

Then he turned to Chen Qing Xu.

Gu Yun didn't want to look at his dumb appearance anymore. He tapped Shen Yi's back lightly with his whip and rode away.

When Gu Yun returned to the capital for his report, the common

people had heard about it first, passing the words by mouth. On that day, the streets and alleys were packed with people, waiting for a glimpse of the general of Black Iron Camp. Unexpectedly, after waiting for a long time, there was nothing — coming from the post station and the Northern Camp, there were only a few civil officers who had been sent on behalf of the imperial court, accompanied by the Northern Frontier garrison and a general unknown to many from the Black Iron Camp.

Gu Yun had found himself an inconspicuous small carriage to go home and directly went to the palace for an audience with the Emperor the next day.

He used to love trotting across the markets, with a cartful of fruits tossed, numbing his lids from winking to all the ladies with a neat face on the side of the road. But now he no longer liked such things. Firstly, Jiangnan has yet to be recovered, there was no face. Second, he gradually began to dislike such pomp and bustle, he could not tell why, perhaps he was already tired, perhaps he had already grown old.

At this time, Chang Geng was on the way up north, not knowing what was keeping him, he had yet to return. Chang Geng was not at home, Gu Yun had nothing to do but listen to the bird's scolding.

He dared not relax to eat and sleep for three or five days to cultivate his vitality — that's the way of a young person. He no longer had the luxury for such thing, if he really relaxed the strings of his mind, he feared that what awaited for him was not high spirits, but serious illness.

Thus he came to Li Feng for a quick attendance then went to Jiangbei.

Before Gu Yun left, Master Feng Han visited him.

Master Feng Han didn't even have time to drink tea after sitting down, hurriedly taking Gu Yun away: "Marshal, Your Highness *Yan Wang* wrote to me and asked me to show you something before you go."

Gu Yun said with a smile, "Why, did Master Feng Han make a sea monster?"

Zhang Feng Han laughed and did not reply, acting mysteriously. In the past few years, he always bore the face of having no one to take care of his funeral. Turns out it was due to having nothing to do. In these years, he lived in Ling Shu Institute all day long. Instead, he was like an old tree that bloomed, there were colors on his face as if he had met a beautiful old lady.

Gu Yun had to get on his old man's carriage and took on the job of serving tea, pouring water automatically, not letting Zhang Feng Han become dehydrated from talking too much: "Master Feng Han becomes stronger with age, truly makes people feel envious."

Zhang Feng Han hurriedly said ‘I dare not’ and received the teacup. His white beard was raised as he smiled: "Only when the imperial court had use of this old man did my life have any joy. Everyone is disgusted with dirty engines and steel armors. But I loved this line of work since I was a child. Not only do I love it, but also love it to fruition. Isn't it a beautiful thing?"

Gu Yun thought about it for a moment and felt that it was very true, but unfortunately, this logic couldn't be applied to himself — it's normal for people to love fire engine and steel armor, and it's just like human beings for people serving as officers to love high ranks and wealth, but when it came to him, if he were to say that he loved fighting wars, loved killing people… it was not a sensible thing.

But it was he who chose this road.

Why?

Gu Yun could not tell for a moment. All he remembered was that he hated ‘going to the frontier’ when he was a child because it meant being separated from his playmates, seeing his terrible father every day, and not being able to eat well or sleep well.

When he was in his teens, he was put on the battlefield by his father's old subordinates. Before his young passion could rise up, he already made a neither too big nor too small mistake in his first

battle — later, he gradually became accustomed to the days of eating sand in the border areas, he also had several years of being young and frivolous.

When he heard the truth of the Black Iron Camp's incident from Jia Lai, his original intention of opening up territory was completely extinguished. Every day, he seemed to only try to fulfill his duties.

While the whole country was immersed in the joy of victory in the north and the recovery of Jiangnan that would soon come, the commander of the four sides and an old man were sitting on a rickety carriage, questioning his own choice, and could not understand it.

He recalled the life he had lived, realizing that whether it was his wide open career path, walking through the city and gathering every beauty's hearts, or unparalleled heroism, charging on the iron steed, standing high above looking down on the world… they were all very faded now.

Now, all he was able to remember were the moments when he wanted to give up his duty.

Just as his mind wandered, Zhang Feng Han said, "Marshal, we're here."

Gu Yun had gathered up all old memories covered in dust, put on an expectant expression to make the old man happy: "You still have not told me what the Ling Shu Institute has created?"

As his voice dropped, he suddenly felt the ground rumble strangely, as if there was something huge moving past, and there were sounds of exclamations coming from outside the carriage.

Gu Yun jumped out of the carriage and froze.

He saw a huge thing lying in front of his eyes. Gu Yun said: "This is... the steam rail car? "

As if the drawings he looked at in the post station on a cold night had come to life. On the front of the car, there were carvings of hundreds of galloping horses. A horse's head at the front with its mane flowing, appeared like it was tilting its head back to let out a

long whine. Behind it, there were sections that seemed like they could hold many things very well. The complicated devices on the wheels were exposed, which made people dazzled. A layman such as Gu Yun totally could not tell which parts were actually useful and which were purely decorative.

"The track is under construction. This section is just for a trial run and is not very long." Zhang Feng Han's nose was sweating from excitement "Ge Chen! Where is Ge Chen?"

A small round face appeared in the window behind the horsehead: "Ah, Master! Marquis! "

Zhang Feng Han: "Show Marshal what our train looks like running!"

Ge Chen stretched his neck and howled, "Roger!"

After that, he withdrew to the front of the train. A monkey-like young Ling Shu held two flags and swirled them in front for a bit. The steam rail car then slowly fired up. The fragrance of *Ziliujin* that only Gu Yun could detect floated out of the steam on the roof. Then a long cry of the horn came. A series of tails behind the body did not affect the movement of the head. It ran steadily, running faster and faster, running faster and faster ——

Finally disappearing from Gu Yun's sight.

A group of crazy Ling Shus around began to cheer again. Zhang Feng Han could only maintain order with his voice: "What about the rule! The rule! In front of the Marquis of Order, can you save some dignity for me?"

Nobody listened to him.

Zhang Feng Han had to turn to Gu Yun and said awkwardly: "Marshal, how embarrassing, They have been doing this for the past two days, shouting each time the train runs, it's useless no matter who came over — Alas, to tell you the truth, it was thanks to Master Du who bought the drawing at a high price using his connections overseas. However, whether the foreigners helped or not to invade

our Dynasty, they were very treacherous. They hid several techniques, starting from the land collection along the canal up to now, countless refined iron and dark iron have been discarded. If it wasn't for the help of His Highness *Yan Wang* behind the scenes, this project would have been abandoned by the people above...it was not easy for these children, please don't mind them."

Gu Yun stood on the spot with his hands behind his back, still looking at the direction of the disappearance of the railway steam car. Truth to be told, he also wanted to scream with the Ling Shu bunch nearby, but afraid of frightening others, he had to force out a stable shell, but his heart was already far away with the long train driven by *Ziliujin*.

An artery-like rail was laid down along the canal, from now on the land of Liangjiang would no longer be far away from the Emperor.

Gu Yun couldn't help but think of the vision that Chang Geng once said to him: "*All the machines running on the ground will be in the fields, that the flying Kites in the sky are filled with ordinary travelers who take their families home to visit their relatives..."*

Gu Yun turned to Zhang Feng Han and said with a sincere smile, "How fortunate that I haven't given up my duty throughout so many years. Otherwise, where can I find an opportunity to witness this godly thing so early?"

Master Feng Han was completely unable to understand his feelings, "Hahaha, Marshal you jest," he said.

Gu Yun didn't know what name he would be given in history books after hundreds of years from now. Either way, he was there in the Western Regions fighting the rebellion two times, he was there when the capital was about to break down. He was there in the Northern Frontier when they surrendered. When the first steam railcar roared away, he was also there…

In this way, his confusion that had clung to him all the way was undone easily. He found a little amusement in *'I am everywhere'*.

At the beginning of May, Gu Yun left for the South and inquired that *Yan Wang* was on the official road. He simply gave up the Eagle and rode along the official road with a team of Light Cavalry. As expected, in Zhili, which was not far from the capital, his scheme of 'meeting Yan Wang by chance' that he had been brewing for a long time came true.

Chang Geng didn't mean to delay his trip. But he 'sharpened his sword and did not miss the chance to cut the wood*'. He met with every kind of people he needed to meet one by one on his way to the capital so that as soon as he arrived, he would be ready to immediately set off a storm, not leaving room for anyone to make their move.

**basically means "More preparation may quicken the speed in doing work"*

It's a road full of schemes. He didn't expect to meet Gu Yun, who was nowhere to be found. At first, when he heard his underling report about this, he almost bounced out of the carriage.

In front of outsiders, the two pretended to have a thorough understanding of etiquette. As soon as they arrived at the post station inn where they were temporarily resting, he closed the door and sent away all irrelevant people. Chang Geng wished he could glue on Gu Yun, touching him up and down for a time: "Why did you ride on the official road? Don't you feel tired? Are you wounded in the north? Give me your wrist...What's your diet like these days? Did Chen Qing Xu say anything?"

Gu Yun leaned aside, listened to him bringing the usual long-winded words from his letters out and asking orally again. Without hurry, he smiled and asked: "Which one do you want me to report first?"

Chang Geng laughed for a while, but also found that he was too excited: "How did you not use Eagles for such a long way?"

Gu Yun: "I changed it in the front post station."

Chang Geng was stunned. Suddenly, he realized Gu Yun's implication and raised his head in amazement: "You are...because..."

"Isn't it? I have been waiting for a long time on the way to rob His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*." Gu Yun reached out and propped himself up on both sides of Chang Geng's head, resting his chin on Chang Geng's shoulder, and said lazily, "If you want to pass by here, leave your money."

Chang Geng's throat moved a little, he thought of the palm that was sent through thousands of miles: "Robbing my possession or robbing my body? As for possession, there is a royal mansion, an isolated courtyard, a shop specializing in selling rare things, and... "

Gu Yun pretended to be surprised and said: "So rich? Meeting this kind of fat sheep on my first time robbing, how lucky... Then I'll have to rob your body! "

Chang Geng laughed and pulled him down suddenly, lying on his stomach and said in Gu Yun's ear, "Yifu, you must have seen the steam train. What about the thing you have promised me?"

Gu Yun immediately changed his mind: "You see my mouth. I was wrong just now. I'll say it again — kid, you'd better take out your money."

Chang Geng 'pitifully' acted spoiled and said next to his ear: "No money, money has all been taken by my man to drink and play, can I not sell myself instead?"

He stayed in Liangjiang camp for several months, almost taking on their accent. He did not know where he learned such a soft voice. The words 'my man' dragged long into Gu Yun's ear, making Gu Yun's back feel numb. There was no method to deal with this kind of 'darling' but to give him whatever he wishes, letting him do as he pleased.

Unfortunately, the two only had one quick night of intimate warmth. The next day they would have to sort out their luggage and brush by each other, one up north and one down south, like changing shifts.

**check the comment for this note for the link to maotuanxjj's art of the above scene on twitter*

Yan Wang officially returned to the court and took charge of the Grand Council.

Fang Qin silently prepared two pieces of an essay. If *Yan Wang* failed to deal with the Feng Huo tickets, he accused *Yan Wang* of being the disaster to the country and the people. In those days, he was so short-sighted that he promoted the Feng Huo tickets that had caused the current chaos. Maybe he could abolish the several official governance reforms of *Yan Wang* and restore the imperial court to its original state.

If those tycoons who did not respect the Ministry of Household succeeded in dealing the Feng Huo tickets after the appearance of *Yan Wang*, there would be plenty of places to criticize. Did Yan Wang not always flaunt himself as an independent and upright man, with no party and factions? Fang Qin knew that he and Du Wan Quan and their group soon had their scheme, but he was not able to grasp his weak spot. This time, he would come out and say—— *As a Prince, you had everything possible to transfer the national financial power to this group of ambitious businessmen who went to sea several times and even had connections with the Westerners, what are you planning?*

Fang Qin was fully prepared and never planned to let *Yan Wang* move. When he and *Yan Wang* passed by and nodded to each other at the Great Court Meeting, Fang Qin felt that *Yan Wang* was not going to let him go either.

The author has something to say:

It's almost over =w=

Chapter 117: Heavy

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Don't let the Marquis of Order go back to the capital.

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In the period that *Yan Wang* was absent, the contradiction between the new officials and the aristocratic forces in the dynasty became more acute. One group trying to preserve their nobility and righteousness, while the other raised up with the wind. Sometimes, the gap between those from the social classes and those from all walks of life was no less than that between the Barbarians of the Eighteen Tribes and the Great Liang people.

The aristocratic family has been handed down from generation to generation. Almost every family owns a large area of land. Since the price of grain kept falling in the year of Yuan He, for the sake of their income in the future, aristocratic families had dipped their hands in doing business, changing from carrying it out in secret when under Emperor Wu's ruling to a well-spread trend. On one hand, it gives the merchants who used to be the lowest rank in society a chance to step up, on the other hand, it also had a bad effect on private merchants.

Since Emperor Tai Zu's generation, there have been laws and regulations in Great Liang — any renowned individuals, or anyone with the status of princes and nobles, and the like, were not allowed to compete with the people for profits, because once the word 'official' was involved in business, it will no longer be purely business. Even if they did not actively bully others, there would be villains who would ride on their coat tails.

The feud between the old aristocratic family and the new officials had a long history and was not a matter of one generation or dynasty.

At this time, the new nobles came to power, just like a salted fish turning over*. Whether be it the east wind prevailing over the west wind or the west wind prevailing over the east wind, of course, the old aristocratic family would spare no effort to suppress it. New

hatred and old hatred stacked together. They could hold their noses and work together when the country was in a mess. At this time, the Barbarians had already bowed down and Jiangnan could free up their hands again. The war situation was not so urgent, their conflict immediately broke out once more.

**idiom for 'reversal of fortune'/'underdog achieves success'*

Yan Wang did not even have time to ease things up when he returned to the court, what was waiting for him was the noisy fighting in the Grand Court Meeting.

They argued from whether to abolish the Feng Huo tickets to the malpractices of the new administration of officials, then at last, attacking the Canal Office. Then, from imperial power to the civil rights, from civil and commercial order to the patriarchal clan system, finally the argument has somehow even moved to the army. From the current expenditure of the garrisons on all four borders, breaking out like a wild horse and going straight to the question of whether Jiangnan should continue to fight or not — the Fang Qin party had grasped the root of *Yan Wang*. If not for the huge war expenditure in recent years, the Treasury crying out in poverty, Yan Wang would not be able to seize the opportunity to make money the priority, plunging the court in chaos like this.

A certain noble family member came out to pick a fight: "Your Majesty, the Eighteen Tribes had surrendered, from now on we will have rich *Ziliujin* sources. The vitality of the country is slowly recovering, it is really not suitable to fight again within three to five years. I think the peace talks presented by the Westerners recently are very sincere. They can withdraw from Changjiang, give up the occupied land, we can allow them to open up western ports along the East Sea and disperse the garrison to ports along the coast, which can not only provide peace for the people, but also serve as a transit place for our maritime trade in the future. Marshal Gu, regardless of reason, is always provocative. Continuing to add more conditions, it is quite heartless. "

Naturally, someone from *Yan Wang*'s Party retaliated: "Why should we give up the fertile land along the East Sea to a group of Western monkeys? Can't we open ports ourselves? Don't we have our

own merchant caravan? The lands that the ancestors passed down, you'll just give them up to the Westerners just like that. Looking at the entire court, there is no one more generous than you!"

Fang Qin went to the battle in person, casting the 'betraying the country' topic aside and said without hesitation, "The Westerners came from a long distance, most of their resources needed to be supplied from thousands of miles away. The soldiers they brought were only tired people far away from their home country. In my opinion, we do not have to overreact like facing off a formidable opponent. We can pretend to negotiate with them. In ten or eight years, it would be difficult for them to continue. Marshal Gu devoted himself to Great Liang, these years he had been continuously injured, never had a few comfortable and reassuring days. For the sake of hundred thousand soldiers bathed in blood on the front line, I also agree it's time to stop fighting and rest — this matter can be discussed later, I don't know if Your Highness *Yan Wang* has any...plan for the Feng Huo tickets?"

Yan Wang, who had been listening on from the start was dragged out by him at this time, he looked up at Fang Qin and said, "There's no need to discuss it again later, after all, Feng Huo tickets has 'Feng Huo'* as its name, it is closely related to the war. Since you gentlemen want to cut off the land to feed the wolves and tigers, the third batch of Feng Huo tickets has no reason to be issued. The court can always repay the debt with the tax revenue of the next five years as guarantee."

**reminder that feng huo literally means 'fire beacon', which was a fire lit to give warning to local people of the approach of an enemy*

Fang Qin shook his head and said with a smile, "*Yan Wang* had spoken from temper. Can a truce be called 'feeding the wolves and tigers'? The Westerners have been losing day by day, this is a defeated enemy seeking surrender! When they arrive at sea, they are nothing but a group of rootless duckweeds, not adequate enough cause any serious trouble."

Chang Geng also smiled and said: "It's really impressive that Master Fang knows everything in the world without leaving home. He knows that the Westerners are rootless duckweeds from thousands

of miles away. Such far-sighted ability, people truly cannot catch up to your shadow."

Seeing that the two people were getting acrimonious in the tone of greeting each other, Li Feng had to come forward and say, "Matters of the army, there are soldiers in the army to decide, I called you all here to discuss the urgent matter of the Feng Huo tickets. Why are you arguing about the Liangjiang battle? Can't calculate a few meager account books, but brought up so much troubles instead —— A Min, you should also talk less."

An assistant minister of the Ministry of Revenue came out at the right time and continued the Emperor's words: "Your Highness *Yan Wang* has just returned from Jiangbei. I'm afraid you haven't figured out the reason why the third batch of Feng Huo tickets are delayed.

“As you know, although the salaries of the civil and military officials in our dynasty are rich compared with those in the previous dynasty, but everyone has their families to take care of, this little salary is just enough to maintain a little face, how dare anyone be rich and powerful when the country is in trouble? How many people have gone bankrupt since the subscription of Feng Huo tickets was included in the official inspection? At present, we can't get any more money. Your Highness has always had intimate relations with the merchant alliance tycoons and Du Wan Quan. Do you think you can come out to ask them for their donation once more?"

Of course, Chang Geng refused to fall into this trap with a hidden meaning, he said: "On the way back to the capital, I have visited Master Du and the others. Now, factories have been built all over the country. As a righteous businessman, sometimes he also has to take care of refugees, which costs a lot of money. Now, most of the resources had been poured into the Canal Office, even if they are willing to go bankrupt to help the country, could they also abandon the refugees that had taken a lot of effort to settle? To tell you the truth, Master Du's original words to me was that right now, he could not find another coin."

Fang Qin refused to let him go. "Why didn't Your Highness think of leaving a way out back when you pushed forward the Feng Huo ticket?"

Chang Geng looked at him coolly: "Master Fang, I said clearly at the beginning that the money should be borrowed first. When it is due two years later, when the Treasury is no longer in a tight spot, there will be a solution, if not, we can use the third batch of Feng Huo tickets to solve the urgent problem — at the time of counting the income, Master Fang had already taken charge of the Ministry of Revenue, you yourself didn't raise any objection. Now, you come and ask me. On the contrary, I would like to ask you, where did the money flowing in and out of the Ministry of Revenue in the past two years go to? Why are we lacking so much?"

Fang Qin finally couldn't help but say angrily: "The account books are all there. If *Yan Wang* has doubts about this official, you can go to check them!"

Chang Geng's gave an unamused laugh: "True, how can the masters in the Ministry of Revenue not be able to calculate a few account books, it must means that during that year, Master Fang had lost his mind, making a miscalculation?"

Li Feng: "Enough!"

Fang Qin hurriedly apologize while Chang Geng bowed slightly and stood on the side stubbornly. He was very silent most of the time in the court meeting, even if there was something needed to be said, it was always done by his underling, he seldom went head to head with others. Fang Qin couldn't help looking at him and had a feeling that something was wrong.

Yan Wang must have prepared a solution for the situation of the Feng Huo ticket. Why would he rather fight in front of the Emperor than say it properly to ease the crowd? What was he planning?

The Grand Court Meeting was dismissed in displeasure. *Yan Wang* was kept behind, walking silently with Li Feng. Although Li Feng's broken leg has recovered, it was all along an incompletely cured illness. If he walked a bit too fast, he would appear a little unbalanced.

"Take a walk in the garden with me." Li Feng said.

It happened that the Crown Prince had just finished studying and was playing with the Third Prince in the garden. As he saw his father and young uncle, he hurriedly came to greet them. The Crown Prince grew different each year, he already had the appearance of a young teen. The Third Prince was only five years old and was still changing his teeth, his words were a little leaky when talking.

When Li Feng met the Crown Prince, of course, he would want to display his father's prestige. First, he scolded the Crown Prince out of nothing, then interrogated him about his studies.

The Crown Prince replied well at first, but continuously glanced at his younger brother near the end. Li Feng followed his gaze, suddenly not knowing whether to laugh or cry.

The toothless Third Prince was not old enough to be interrogated by his father. He was standing on one side silently at first then was waved away by *Yan Wang*. He took him to sit on the ground with great carelessness, grabbed several grass stems and weaved it into a grasshopper. When have the children in the Forbidden Palace ever seen this kind of countryside playthings? The Third Prince's eyes were wide open, watching dumbly. Soon, the little child had a grass grasshopper in his left hand and a grass cricket in his right hand. He was so happy that he didn't care to cover up his missing front tooth.

Li Feng scolded: "...Losing ambition from playing too much, where is dignity!"

He stared at Chang Geng with a straight face, then sent away the two children reluctant to leave. Li Feng saw the Third Prince tiptoeing to place the grasshopper into the Crown Prince's hand, the Crown Prince then held his little brother's empty hand. The eldest child led the younger child, looking like a pair of little brothers from an ordinary family.

The Crown Prince was gentle, like his grandfather.

Li Feng rarely felt moved. When he turned to Chang Geng, his face also softened a lot. He asked, "After such a long time, you still do not want to get married?"

Chang Geng's smile faded immediately.

Li Feng saw that he didn't like to mention this matter, he sighed, "Or big brother can be an initiator, choosing a child from within the family for you to adopt. When you become older in the future, there must be someone to care for you."

Chang Geng paused and twisted his hands together, as if there was still grass juice left on his fingers. He looked at the direction of the Third Prince's departure, his face seemed quite moved. But after a while, he still did not nod.

Chang Geng: "Thank you very much, Royal Brother, There is no need."

"The child that follows you can inherit royal title, in the future, even if he does not have any merit, he will be at least be a *Jun Wang* with a promising future. There are many people willing to leave their child in your care." Li Feng said, "You don't have to worry about feeling guilty of robbing people's children."

Chang Geng suddenly bowed, "Your Majesty, Your Subject is willing to follow the footsteps of Lord Shang. I do not want to drag down descendants."

Li Feng's eyes twitched a little, he turned to look at him in silence.

Chang Geng bent over and refused to straighten up. He seemed young and powerful at first glance, but he was lonely and bleak.

Willing to follow the example of Lord Shang — to reform by any means, to be hated and despised by the world, to be split open in the market, become the cinders that burn themselves for the era.

**Lord Shang — Shang Yang was an ancient Chinese philosopher, politician and a prominent legalist scholar. He pushed for a lot of reforms that affected the nobility. Due to this, when a new king was appointed, he was punished by dismemberment and all of his family and relatives were executed*

On that day, all the eunuchs and palace attendants were

dismissed far away. No one knew what the Li brothers had said in the garden. From noon until dark, *Yan Wang* finally left the palace by himself.

There were only a few grasses that have been pulled out and made into insects, laying bare.

The next day, Jiang Chong received an instruction from *Yan Wang — Don't let the Marquis of Order go back to the capital. We might not fight this battle, but he must stay in Liangjiang.*

The heavy rain in Jiangnan was cruel. A few days ago, it was still too hot for people to sleep. Suddenly, a strong wind and rain changed the sky, the humidity could penetrate into people's bones.

Master Ja wiped away the moisture from his face and walked up quickly. He climbed to the top along the iron steps protruding from the ugly and terrifying shell of the Western sea monster. An old man with dazzling white hair was leaning on something with his back facing him. His waist was like a piece of bamboo bent from being burnt.

Master Ja gave a slight cough: "Your Majesty, it's already late, why are you not resting?"

"When you get old, you will be abandoned by sleep," the Pope said, waving his hand. "Come here, look at this."

There was a '*Qian Li Yan*' on the top of the sea monster, this was not a small gadget that can be clipped on the bridge of the nose. It's three feet long, made of copper, with circles on the surface like the trace on a bamboo joint, firmly fixed on the ground with a triangular leg. There was a circle of complicated carvings on the long copper cylinder, written in all Western characters.

This was the true '*Qian Li Yan*'*, which can see a thousand miles.

**reminder than Qian Li Yan is literally 'thousand-mile eye'*

Through this long tube, they could see the territory of the other side of Great Liang from the sea monster floating in the East Sea.

In just a few years, the quiet fertile land from a thousand miles on the opposite side began to burn under the night. The brightest and most concentrated light was the watchtower of the garrison, then much softer in the area behind. Those were the lights of many new factories working and keeping watch at night. It was not very bright, but it was distributed everywhere, like a handful of tiny stars.

"What is Your Majesty looking at?" Master Ja asked curiously "Has the enemy moved? "

"The enemy has always been moving," the Pope murmured. "Those people in the Holy Land first succumbed to their greed, then put their unrealistic expectations on the peace talks. We have lost our best chance, making retreat after retreat. Now the ship has to move back to the sea. After a while, the Great Liang people are likely to send troops to cut off the supply line we have contact with. When it comes to that, there is no telling how it would end."

Master Ja: "Didn't we make a careful calculation as to why we retreated to the coast? By now, the Dong Ying Islands can be used as a special supply channel. We can move on the open sea. Although the Great Liang people imitated our fast-moving tiger shark *Jiaos*, the overall fleet design is not suitable for the open sea operations."

"The Dong Ying people are like a pack of wild dogs. When you have an advantage, they will not hesitate to come for a piece of rotten meat. Once you lose power, don't expect to get their loyalty." The Pope sighed in a low voice, "Besides, is the conclusion that the Great Liang navy can't adapt to the operation in the high seas certain? A few years ago they didn't even have a decent Navy — how can we base our victory percentage on the assumption that the enemy is weak? "

Master Ja was silent for a moment: "But Your Majesty, the messenger..."

"That's why I've come to you," said the Pope, drawing a letter from his arms, his hands shaking like autumn leaves, but his

expression was cold and hard, with no sign of his usual gentleness. "Letter from home, read it."

Master Ja quickly picked it up, then his face paled: "Is...Is this true? "

The pope said in a low voice: "The Holy Land is changing."

The Conservative Party detested the Liberal Party, making them sit in office without any real power, hence they had decided to borrow tens of thousands of people from affiliated countries, attacking the Holy Land in the name of protest, creating riots, deposing the king, executed more than thirty old nobles, including the first successor in line, and pushed a pitiful child from very distant relatives on the throne.

A few days later, the Royalists fought back, the new king was forced to step down after only wearing the crown for seven days.

Now the political arena of the Holy Land was very unclear. Anything could happen. The holy messenger who was loyal to the old king had, of course, lost his power. However, the Royalists were trying their best to appease to the Holy See that had been neglected by the old king for half a lifetime. They would not be a hindrance for them for now.

Master Ja's thinking was very sharp, he has figured out all the key points in a moment.

The Pope suddenly turned around and stared at him like a falcon. "This is an opportunity, do you understand?"

Master Ja lowered his voice excitedly: "Then the messenger..."

"He is no longer the messenger," said the Pope, with a slight nod of his head, his attitude was both dollice and cold.

Master Ja took a deep breath and clenched his fist under the complicated cuff: "I'm going to prepare now."

"Jacques," said the Pope, with his old hands folded in his sleeves and standing in the night wind, "If we lose this chance, we may never

be able to set foot on this land again. It has awoken."

Master Ja looked back at the distant shore, recalled the lights he had just seen, his heart shaken, he left in a hurry.

While the Great Liang people were unaware, there was a violent ‘rebellion’ in the Western army.

From the time when the messenger received the news from the Holy Land to when he decided to flee, it was less than an incense time. It was not that he was indecisive. Unfortunately, he did not know that the news sent for him had been intercepted by others.

From his escape to his secret arrest by the Pope's elite guards standing by in wait, it was also less than an incense time.

The messenger and his underlings were killed on the spot by Master Ja. A ship was then set up, pretending as if the messenger had departed after finishing his business, hiding the information about the internal chaos in the Holy Land. In the peaceful Western military port, ordinary soldiers were still making routine inspections. They only knew that the messenger was called back to the Holy Land, from now on, they would return to having only one leader.

The Pope did not change his soft attitude towards the peace talks with the Great Liang people. On the surface, he continued to retreat little by little until the autumn equinox of the ninth year of Long An.

**Starting from September 22nd to September 24th*

A batch of Western supplies arrived at the Western military port by sea. A large number of military supplies and *Ziliujin* were like a dark mass of a group of demons, landing on the coast of Jiangnan.

Chapter 118: Old Enemy

—

Gu Yun found a very serious problem.

—

For the entire nine years of Long An, Great Liang was engulfed in the scent of gunpowder.

At the end of May, the royal court, represented by *Yan Wang*, met with the original thirteen tycoons who bought the Feng Huo tickets and announced that the first batch of Feng Huo tickets were due. At the same time, the 'Bank of Long An' approved by Li Feng himself was also set up, with the headquarters in the capital city and branches set up everywhere else in the country. Before the completion of the branches, the local government was responsible for collecting and cashing the expired Feng Huo tickets.

The next day, the Bank of Long An disclosed several alternative cashing methods — with real money, or opening an account at the Bank of Long An, change the tickets into deposit, then change into Long An tickets that could be used nationally. If the share reaches a certain standard, if one wanted to, they could also exchange the share from the official factory held by the Canal Office. All the prices were listed, which was enough to fill a thick account book. Fang Qin and others gnashed their teeth — for this was yet another thing *Yan Wang* had perhaps thought of for a long time.

In the past, there were also various kinds of banks in Great Liang, including private banks by common people, banks of royal merchants, and government's banks for official foreign trade and exchange. The Bank of Long An forced all the banks of government officials into one, the gentle image of *Yan Wang* before was changed. After his return, as if he was possessed, he turned more and more insane day after day.

Although royal merchants had the word ‘royal’, most of them had lords of various families as their backing. When they want to bully others, they remembered the word ‘royal’ on their head. When they want to enrich their own pockets, there was only one word ‘merchant’ left. They were already used to having no division between private and public. The account books were a mess of mud and water, the interests inside could not be made clear even after listing them out for three days. They have long regarded the official industry as their own family business. Who would think that everything would change overnight, having their ‘family business’ robbed from them as such?

From May to August, every day in the court, there were chickens flying and dogs dancing.

A high ranking manager in an official's bank stepped out, acting as the first bird to resist death and was immediately found guilty of fraud and corruption and sent to prison; he was to be investigated and dealt with. His wife was originally pregnant, because of this, she had been running around for many days, combined with her naturally poor health, as a result, she had a miscarriage — one corpse, two lives.

The mother-in-law was an old woman. At the 70th birthday of that year, even the former emperor had personally written her the words ‘God of Longevity’. Having only one daughter at an old age, she had given her utmost love and care — how could she stand this? She held onto the former emperor's plaque, insisting on hanging herself.

For a time, all the nobles in the capital wished they could skin *Yan Wang*.

But Fang Qin skillfully avoided *Yan Wang*, who had the status of a nobleman, and pointed the spear at the Grand Council, contacting the people on his side within the six ministries, and joined together to write a letter denouncing sixteen crimes of the Grand Council. The group passionately asked the Emperor to dismiss the Grand Council that was a ‘temporary wartime institution’.

The person behind the Grand Council, of course, was not

someone who was in the position only in name. Of course, he would fight back. All the dirty things that have been going on for a long generation ago were laid out on the table for all to see. The court was full of open guns and hidden arrows, every side was fighting to the death. Even if it was someone who had never been involved, they would still eat one or two stray arrows just passing by.

Near the Mid-Autumn Festival, it was almost white hot. Even Jiang Chong who was such a cautious person was also involved in a case and had his duties suspended to wait for investigation.

Everyone knew in their hearts that even though the Emperor seemed to be fair, he was actually protecting *Yan Wang*, otherwise, how could he still be so quiet and still in the midst of this storm?

It was noisy until the mid-autumn night.

According to the common practice, Li Feng was going to have a family dinner in the back palace. On the way, he met the Third Prince. Even the strictest people were tolerant of the youngest child. Li Feng expressed a rare display of gentleness, calling him over and leading him by the hand. The Third Prince, like his brothers, was also afraid of his father and did not dare to say a word. He tried hard to reach his father's hand and trotted along with him, his face soon turned red from running.

The servant had to remind him, only now did Li Feng looked down and saw his little son trembling. For some reason, he remembered that day when *Yan Wang* sat on the grass and made grass insects for the little boy.

Li Feng: "Go call *Yan Wang* into the palace to have a family dinner."

The servant hurriedly complied, but after a long run, he didn't manage to bring the person back.

"Your Majesty, your servant was not able to find His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*."

Li Feng frowned. "Is he not at the Grand Council?"

The servant said cautiously: "Isn't there something wrong with Master Jiang recently? Someone is making a fuss about wanting to shut down the Grand Council. His Highness said that in order to avoid more conflict, he had stopped his daily affairs. Isn't his apology letter still on your desk?"

Li Feng rubbed his eyebrows and remembered this matter: "Didn't you go to find him at home? The Prince's manor? And even the Marquis manor…"

"Yes, I did" the servant whispered, "The family servants said that *Yan Wang* had left for Hu Guo Temple. These two days, he was in Master Liao Ran's Zen Room."

Li Feng: "..."

On the night of the Mid-Autumn Festival, thousands of families were reunited, yet *Yan Wang,* who was under one person but above ten thousand, was all alone under a poor monk's lantern of Buddha.

...There were also a number of people trying to pull him off his horse.

Li Feng suddenly felt irritated.

Although he felt moved that Chang Geng in the imperial garden was determined to follow the footsteps of Lord Shang, he did have a headache about the troubles *Yan Wang*'s excessive means in this period of time had caused. This time, he punished Jiang Chong to remind him it was already enough, they should appropriately be restrained.

At this time, the bad feeling gradually changed in Li Feng's mind. No matter how *Yan Wang* was, he was still one of the Li's — what he did in this period of time, even if he was too hasty, was also to close the holes in the imperial court. Besides, there was no place in this country that did not belong to the ruler. He himself as the Emperor didn't say anything, yet these ministers of the royal family were competing in throwing a tantrum. It was quite disrespectful to the

royal family.

That year, Li Feng clearly knew that Wang Guo had a problem. He still angrily guarded his uncle in the palace when Tan Hong Fei came for questioning. It was because Li Feng was born to eat soft but not hard. It's one thing that he was willing to keep his balance. But this time, it's another thing for all the families to join hands to deal with *Yan Wang*.

"*These people are overstepping the line*," Li Feng thought.

However, before the seed in the Emperor's heart had the chance to sprout, a great event happened thousands of miles away that night ——

The Western Navy, which had retreated to the coastal port, was still pretending to send congratulations on the festival to the Jiangbei garrison the day before. The dew on the flowers that had been sent had not even dried yet, they turned their faces the next day, using their full strength as if they had been planning this for a long time.

Launching a large scale invasion on the Liangjiang garrison.

Since Gu Yun was stationed in Liangjiang, the patrol requirements of the local garrison was basically increased to the standard of the Black Iron Camp. Although the imperial court had been burning for a long time, the Jiaos, Eagles and Light and Heavy Armor in Jiangbei were all in a state of loose outside but tight inside, ready for combat at any moment.

At night, the watchtower that was closely monitoring the enemy's movements in the southeast first found the movement of the Western Navy. It turned on the alarm light. The bright white light was like a rainbow that was shot through the dark water. It was not necessary to wait for the commander's order. The short Jiaos on the forefront would gather near the water surface on the ground quickly set up the iron fence for wartime defense. At the same time, the soldier keeping watch and reported the news flew straight from the watchtower to

the Marshal tent.

On the main ship of the Western army, Master Ja rushed in breathlessly: "Your Majesty, they have been closely monitoring our army, we have been discovered."

"That's normal," the Pope didn't raise his eyes. "Last time, their commander just died, the new and old leaders have not handed over their duties, we got lucky once with our surprise attack. Now, Gu Yun is stationed here. Don't dream about unrealistic luck anymore. Go. Since the other side has noticed, let's say hello to our old enemy."

As soon as his words were finished, the herald had gone quickly to deliver the order.

Master Ja frowned: "Your Majesty, I think that… - Did we choose an inappropriate time? Why can't we wait a little longer? The interior of Great Liang also faces the same problem of changing powers as the Holy Land. Maybe after a period of time, there will be opportunities for us to... "

He didn't get to finish, a loud noise came from outside — the fast moving vanguard warship opened fire!

There was no turning back once it had been fired, explosions rang out one after another. Master Ja shivered and realized that he had to focus on the war situation. After all, he had suffered a great loss under Gu Yun before.

The Pope briefly moved his eyes away from the *Qian Li Yan* and turned to Master Ja: "I have a hunch that this is the best time — move forward at full speed!"

The sea monsters, like a black shadow, have been standing dormant and salivating for a long time. Once again, it waved its ferocious claws and rushed to the border of Great Liang.

However, this time, the weak Great Liang Navy was no longer the same.

In Liangjiang's garrison, the sentry just took over the position of his dead comrades-in-arms. For the first time, he acted as the

commander's ear and eye in response to this critical moment. When he heard the sound of gunfire behind him, he thought that he had delayed the military business. He made a fierce dive with the Eagle armor. When he landed, he ran for dozens of steps and couldn't stop staggering, he was quickly caught by the cavalry comrade patrolling around the Marshal tent.

"Urgent military situation, I want to see Marshal..." The sentry was in a panic, the hand that had been holding him suddenly raised up and pat his head.

The sentry was startled. He looked up and found that the person he thought was someone in charge of guard duty was actually Gu Yun himself.

"Just a defeated enemy, don't be afraid," Gu Yun patted him on the back of the neck and smiled at the young sentry. "Let's go and meet them."

In these two words, the Cavalry and Light Cavalry of the whole camp have been completely assembled. Countless Eagle Armors lit up a purple fire in the dark night. Gu Yun made a long whistle, the flying eagle soars to the sky.

"Long Jiaos and short Jiaos, 3-5 formation, set out of the harbor!"

"Eagles set up the *Baihong* over the iron fence!"

"What else is there?" Gu Yun put the Wind Slasher on his back like a decorative ornament and rubbed his chin. "Oh, also, ready the 'dimsum' that had just been sent by Ling Shu Institute. After growing tired from fighting, we will give our old friends who have come from afar something to chew on."

The Western troops came suddenly, but the Liangjiang garrison was not hasty in their response.

On one side was the Pope who rallied and came all the way across the sea from the Holy Land, and the other side was Gu Yun, the godly Marquis of Order in legend. Finally, the two faced each other head-on in a situation of equal power and no disturbance.

Gu Yun was not a young man who dared to go to battle with only hot blood like Chang Geng. He methodically opened the battle line on the coast and on the water, slowly but orderly, testing the situation.

Unfortunately, his opponent was also one of equal ability, the person commanding the battle this time was not the cowardly Master Ja either. Old ginger is very spicy*. Gu Yun teased him several times. A team of short jiaos that attacked by surprise almost sent the enemy's right wing flying by several times, but the main ship of the enemy's army always responded quickly and immediately closed up.

**referring to the idiom* 姜还是老的辣 *"ginger gets spicier as it gets older" which means "the older, the wiser"*

The Western sea monster seemed to be bulky. In fact, it was not only highly defensive, but also full of thorns. When the ugly iron plates on the surface was lifted, there were countless muzzles connected. The sea monster could be installed with unimaginable amount of *Ziliujin* and ammunition.

With this, their flying Eagles could land down and resupply at will, able to suppress their opponents in the air wherever they go. At the same time, its control of the surrounding sea Jiaos was irreplaceable. Like a queen bee or a queen ant, it could perfectly gather a group of brainless and low level subordinates around.

Gu Yun said to Yao Zhen, "Do you see it? The autonomy of the left and right wings had been replaced by the big guy in the middle. It seems that the Pope has finally packed the stick that stirred shit up among them and threw him into the sea. "

Yao Chong Ze looked worried: "Marshal, it's also them who have been trying to negotiate. What's the purpose of turning over suddenly now?"

Gu Yun licked his lips: "I guess it's because there were political changes within them. Someone gave them a tube of chicken blood. I know a little bit about the fighting style of that old man. At the beginning, he liked to bomb heavily and open his way. It also serves as a test. If it didn't work out, it would be adjusted immediately. But

today, he's entirely different. If it wasn't for the abundant supplies, he wouldn't be so confident. Their supplies would have come from the Dong Ying in the open sea. Our forces there are quite thin."

Yao Zhen's mind was very clear, immediately saying: "Marshal, if that is the case, trying to fight hard is not the way to go. At present, the railway track hasn't been completed. Even if we request supplies now, we still won't have enough time for transportation. What can we do?"

The Western army's gunfire fiercely covered the river and the sea. For a time, the water surface was no different than the flame of hell. The *Ziliujin* was poured into the heart of all the iron monsters with no hesitation, burning everything to ash, becoming a thin stream of white fog, rolling up the sky with impurities and the gunpowder smoke of the artillery. It soon covered the bright and starry night sky with a layer of haze, and the water gathered into a cloud. They were on a gridlock until midnight, it unexpectedly began to rain.

At this time, a messenger trotted over: "Marshal, the sea cuttles are ready!"

"Gather the jiaos on water, launching the main ship, all Eagles move on board." Gu Yun strode to the deck of the main ship and said to Yao Zhen next to him, "Brother Chong Ze should stay on the bank. Don't follow me."

Yao Zhen said with a smile, "Although I have always been greedy for life and afraid of death, what am I afraid of when following Marshal?"

However, it was not long before Yao Zhen regretted his words. Unfortunately, he was seasick —— The power system of the main ship was refitted by Ling Shu Institute according to Gu Yun's idea, it really resembled a white stripe in the waves, as fast as the small jiao soaring in the wind.

Normally, the main fleet would not be rocking too much, but unfortunately, the one giving orders was Gu Yun, even if it flew up, countless small and large Jiaos around would still be in his hands.

The Western army dared not neglect and immediately began to chase and intercept on a large scale.

In this way, the unbreakable and solid formation of the Western army immediately became a constraint. Gu Yun had a strong sense of rhythm. When the fire was concentrated, the fleets would be broken up immediately. After a while, they would gather again into a murderous fleet, like a quick knife always pressed on the side of the opponent's neck, forcing people to follow his rhythm.

Gradually, the word ‘steady’ would be added at the end of every order in the Western sea monster.

However, the situation was not so steady.

Gu Yun quickly found out the weakest place of the Western fleets, the Great Liang Navy immediately gathered together to stab it. The Western sea monsters who couldn't get rid of their tails couldn't react. The Pope had to risk it: "Open the main ship's shell, increase the heavy guns, anyone blocking the path, get out of the way—"

At this time, Gu Yun said to Yao Zhen with a smile: "The idea of the Western sea monster is actually worth learning, but the reason why it has not been decided with Ling Shu Institute is that although their ideas are correct, their technology is not up to standard — maybe we can make a better one in one or two decades later..."

Before he finished speaking, he saw that the Western sea Jiaos, which had been tightly stuck around the sea monster, were suddenly scattered in disorder.

Gu Yun: "The point for breakthrough had appeared, cuttles, don't be stunned!"

Yao Zhen: "Don't worry about it Marshal! Watch out! "

They saw the Western sea monster suddenly lift the black back cover, revealing a row of thick muzzles below.

Gu Yun: "Full speed ahead in the southwest and detonate, these small boats won't be able to withstand us!"

There were two loud sounds, one before and one after, almost at the same time. The first was the short cannon of the Great Liang fleet, blowing over a group of Western short Jiaos that had just fled as they broke into the enemy's position without resistant.

The second was the long cannon of the Western main ship that came right after and almost grazed them. The main ship trembled greatly, Yao Zhen grabbed a post with all his limbs, Gu Yun staggered and strongly collided with the side of the ship.

Yao Zhen was frightened by the sound and said, "Marshal!"

Gu Yun shook his head and got up unconcerned. His eyes were frighteningly bright, "Here comes the snack."

The water surface which was bombarded by big and small guns fluctuated violently. No one was able to see several strange looking ‘Jiaos’ hidden underneath the water — it was a batch of ‘sea cuttles’ recently sent by Ling Shu Institute. They were the Death Squadron in the sea Jiaos team, they could dive secretly from under the water. After the driver locked in the direction, they could jump straight to the sea and abandon ship. There would be ropes on the warship that released the sea cuttles to retrieve them, but even with no one inside, the cuttle could keep its original speed and continue to move forward until it hits something at the bottom of the sea. The impact force could detonate the cuttle.

This was especially made to serve the type of very large ships with its body deeply submerged in the water.

The Western people's solid front was smashed and scattered by Gu Yun's consecutive explosions. Suddenly, the water seemed like a flower as it exploded tens of feet high in the middle of the sea. There was a flash of fire, and before the western people could understand what it was, they saw the main ship twitching violently, catching another sea cuttle.

It seemed that the shell of copper and iron wall was not entirely invulnerable. The whole sea monster's main ship tilted hard to one side. The Western soldiers who had been giving orders by lighting were not able to make a sound as they fell off the sea monster, there

was no telling whether they were dead or alive.

The enemy line instantly became disordered. Gu Yun would of course, never give them time to breathe. The Eagles that had originally boarded the ship immediately chased the long and short Jiaos that had fallen down with absolute suppression in speed.

This startling naval battle was fought from dark to dawn. The rich supplies of the Westerners were not exhausted yet their formation had been broken apart seventy or eighty percent. The Pope, after learning a lesson about Gu Yun's cunning and changeability in battle, suppressed his anger and could only retreat temporarily to wait for a chance to come again.

Gu Yun suddenly relaxed, saying in a hoarse voice: "Just feint to chase, do not be eager to fight."

If the Westerners didn't withdraw, a large number of short Jiaos would soon lose their power and have no time to return to the shore for supplies. Even with Gu Yun present, they would be very passive then. Master Ja's thinking was correct, the Great Liang Navy still lacked the ability to fight on the open sea far from the coast.

"The enemy commander is old in age, he is cautious and careful. It will not be easy to fool him, but his cautious nature is also his downfall. If our opponent today is that animal He Rong Hui of our Black Iron Camp, even if the main ship blew up completely, he will still rob a boat to come fight me. It will not be easy to deal with then." Gu Yun murmured and kneaded his eyes subconsciously with his hand. His vision was blurred. Just now he was too tense to notice. At this time, he realized that it was time to drink medicine. He smiled at Yao Zhen, whose soul still had not returned. He ordered, "Sail back!"

Back in the Marshal tent, Gu Yun didn't dare to rest. He wanted to make up an emergency war report to the imperial court, he also had to deploy the war preparations to avoid such a situation of lacking here and there just now.

He had to ask someone to boil a bowl of medicine for him first. While waiting for the effect, he was whetting the ink and studying how to hold the Western army for some time in the future. Suddenly, a sharp stabbing pain at his nape and back from when he collided with the ship just now arose, creating a large area of bruise. Gu Yun's hand trembled, the whetstone unexpectedly slipped off his hand and fell down.

He gritted his teeth, reached for the table and waited for the pain to pass.

But this time, the pain was unusually severe. Tormenting him for half an hour, until his back was soaked with cold sweat, it gradually became numb and faded.

At this time, Gu Yun found a very serious problem.

His hearing and eyesight that should have become clear again, they still have not recovered.

Chapter 119: Lovesick

—

Have not seen you in a long time, missing you very much.

—

Gu Yun's heart suddenly sank. A moment later, he realized something and looked down at the blurry medicine bowl in front of his eyes.

He did not panic, for he knew this day would come, but momentarily, he still found it difficult to fully accept. Much like how everyone knew they would die sooner or later, but when closing their eyes, most people would not be so willing.

In front of the noisy Liangjiang camp, the coming enemy has retreated, but the warning of the attack has not been lifted. The sharp whistle still rang all around, but in Gu Yun's ear, the sound was like a distant line of sobs.

His world was fuzzy and quiet, the black ink and white paper on the table, in his eyes, were only two mass of blurry colors.

Gu Yun sat motionless at the table for a moment, then unconsciously grasped the string of beads left to him by the former emperor — it was quite strange, Gu Yun had been on the border for a long time and often traveled around, collision in daily life was unavoidable. The thread had been broken several times, but every time without fail, he was able to recover it without exception. Up to now, the thread had been changed three times, but not one bead had gone missing, quietly gathering a cool layer of water vapor, wrapping around his wrist bone.

... As if the man who loved him and harmed him truly always watched over him.

Gu Yun was touched by the wooden beads and finally returned to

his mind.

He did not make a fuss, taking out the emergency liuli glass from his chest and put it on, then bent his fingers and knocked gently on the medicine bowl, breaking it. Gu Yun gathered the broken fragments and swept them into the corner of the wall. He turned around and sat down, writing a report and an order with his face unchanging then sent someone to deliver the letters.

Yao Zhen followed the messenger inside just in time. As he raised his eyes and saw the lens on Gu Yun's face, he wondered, "Why, has Marshal not taken the medicine yet?"

Gu Yun was very fluent with lip-reading now, as if nothing happened, he replied: "I was careless and dropped the bowl — forget it, no need to boil another. Don't worry, even if I'm completely blind, I can still clean up these foreigners."

Yao Zhen glanced at the broken porcelain pieces in the corner of the wall. He kept having the feeling that something might have happened, but even after thinking for a long while, he was still unable to figure it out, he said to Gu Yun instead, "We have an accident here, I'm afraid the capital will undergo changes again."

Gu Yun made an ‘Mm’ sound in response and said: "I'd like to ask brother Chong Ze to send an urgent call to Jiangbei and ask Shen Ji Ping to come here. I need to adjust the deployment of the four regions, and Chen..."

As he said the word ‘Chen’, he suddenly went quiet. Yao Zhen asked curiously, "who?"

"No one." Gu Yun shook his head. "Go."

Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity was still relying on Chen Qing Xu. He did not wish to disturb her.

In the evening of the same day, the emergency war report arrived

in the capital. Li Feng sent people to the Hu Guo Temple overnight to retrieve Chang Geng. Once again, the whole Western Warm Pavilion was full of important officials of the court.

Chang Geng's eyelids were twitching continuously. On his way back to the palace, he always felt something had gone wrong. His heart was in a state of anxiety. When others handed him the battle report of the front line, Chang Geng held his breath, reading the short war report over and over seven or eight times. Confirming that Gu Yun had written it himself. It was concise and clear, the handwriting was orderly and powerful. At least when he wrote this report, the man was still healthy.

Only now did Chang Geng let out a sigh of relief. He settled his mind, closed his eyes slightly and said to himself, "I almost scared myself to death."

He calmed down, his heart also relaxed — this time, the battle in Liangjiang that was initiated by the enemy was a good thing for him.

As soon as the war situation would tense, if Fang Qin and his people dared to clamor to abolish the Grand Council, not only Li Feng, but the garrison of the four regions of Great Liang would also disagree. At that time, they would have more room.

In the end, it was the enemy who helped him accomplish his goal.

Fang Qin was feeling immensely bothered and impatient. In the past half a year, he has been struggling to sleep at night, working hard to gather the ministers from the aristocratic families who were completely scattered. It could be said that he has done everything to the best of his ability. At last, he has won a bit of a periodic victory. The call for the dismissal of the Grand Council was getting louder and louder. Seeing that *Yan Wang* could not even take care of himself, his right and left arms are all involved in affairs, and he was only a little short of the effort to kick the dog down the water —— yet suddenly, the Westerners would move at this time!

If it was Great Liang who took the initiative to attack, they could accuse the Marquis of Order of being ‘eager for battle’, but this

night's attack was the enemy's move.

"Abolish the Grand Council," Li Feng took over a dozen reports from the internal servant, "Cut military expenditure, strictly investigate the occupation of land by non-governmental merchants..."

There was no sound in the Western Warm Pavilion.

Li Feng suddenly threw those dozen reports on the ground: "The Westerners have not retreated yet. You people are already retracting the firewood from under the pot!"

Fang Qin gritted his teeth and swallowed all his words. He wanted to strike first, but Li Feng already blocked his mouth.

At this time, if anyone nearsighted dare to open their mouth, they could easily be assigned to the crime of betraying the country and colluding with the enemy.

Li Feng's eyes then fell on Chang Geng: "And you, do you think you are very aggrieved? Other people had only said a few words, yet you already abandoned official duties, playing sulking and running back home with me. You are already a grown-up, do you have any other trick? The entire Grand Council does not have even one ghost all day long, there are only two sweepers at the door — Li Min, I'm telling you, either get back to the Grand Council tomorrow in an instant! Or you will no longer have to come back at all!"

All key members of the Grand Council knelt down with Yan Wang to apologize humbly.

Li Feng did not answer them, letting them kneel down and turned to Da Li Temple officials with a twist of his face. "Jiang Han Shi was originally from Da Li Temple, he could still be considered to be your former boss. Assigning you the small task of investigating his old case, do you not have the heart to do it? Are you going to put it off until the new year?"

In the sudden disaster, the Da Li Temple minister did not dare to say a word, kneeling down like their neighbors, the Grand Council.

One by one, Li Feng dragged out all the most important officials

for a scolding. Fang Qin was one of the few who had nothing to do with it and was let go by the emperor with only a couple of words. Compared with Yan Wang who was not allowed to stand up, Li Feng's attitude towards him was almost pleasant. He only said, "Subject Fang, the Western army came with ill intent, we can't let the logistic cause us to fall into passive. You are in charge of the Ministry of Revenue, you should pay more attention."

Fang Qin had no choice but to bow his head and answer ‘yes’, as if he had been doused with cold water from head to toe — he realized that his long-term scheme was to be destroyed in one day.

The deserted Grand Council was busy once again, starting to pull all-nighters day after day.

After his return to the Grand Council, the first thing *Yan Wang* did was instructing everyone: "Recently, the border is in a tight situation. Please take the state affairs as priority. Sometimes you will have to suffer grievances, being too thick will lead to being broken, after suffering enough grievances, it will all naturally pay off in the end. Remember these words of mine. About brother Han Shi, the gentlemen needn't worry. Since the emperor has spoken today, he will be safe in a few days."

The crowd looked at him in silence.

Chang Geng continued: "The trick of the Feng Huo ticket can't be played any more. Think about how to make use of the Long An Bank. I said before that I want three things from those people — the money in their hands, the land under their feet, and the people of the world. The first one is already secure. If the second one is shaken, they will fight back. If you have a steady footing, then the third one… and even everything in the future will come naturally."

At this time, someone asked, "Your Highness, the black curtain of the collusion between the big and small merchants and the local officials and businessmen, do you still want to find out?"

"Prioritize the war, national economy, and the people's livelihood, but if there are villains who are determined to block the way, there's no need to endure them. Do your best at what you

should do. As for others matters… if the sky falls, I will shoulder it for the gentlemen." Chang Geng waved his hand, "Get to work. Give me a report tomorrow."

As he finished, like a resolute guarantee, the whole Grand Council, Ling Shu Institute, Canal Office, all the tycoons who held a lot of wealth, all the new officials that occupied half of the dynasty, they all rotated around this backbone in an orderly manner and performed their respective duties.

Five days later, Jiang Chong finished his case and returned to his original position. The Liangjiang garrisons issued a call to arms: ‘Crusade against the foreign invaders, recover the homeland!”. Within five days, they exchanged fire with the Western troops three times and did not relent for even one step.

At the same time, Gu Yun ordered to adjust the structure of the garrison. Within a day, he issued seven arrow banners of command in a row, all of which were to be recorded in the Grand Council, making the officials running errands in the Grand Council have a chance to truly 'run errands', creating a slight breeze whenever they passed by.

At the fourth night watch period, Chang Geng laid down on the desk and had a moment of shut-eye. It was not a deep sleep. Because of the Bone of Impurity, even if he wanted to have a clear nightmare now, he had to gather together ‘the favorable time and place’, otherwise, all dreams were an entangled mess, even the slightly loud sound of flipping a book next door could wake him up.

Wu Er Gu was the name of the evil god. In most cases, when he had just woken up, his heart would be full of restlessness and rage. However, on this day, when the footsteps outside the door woke Chang Geng up, he lifted his face from his arms and instantly sat up straight, but his heart was beating in disorder and confusion. Instead of the usual rage, he was both confused and sad, his sleeves were still stained with tears.

At this time, someone said at the door: "Your Highness, there is a letter from Jiangnan."

Chang Geng took a deep breath quietly: "Bring it in."

It was still about Gu Yun's big move — he was planning to increase his troops in the southwest, without saying why, he only explained the garrison position, commander-in-chief, the coordination of military services and the way of ration transportation in detail. Chang Geng hurriedly read it, not quite understanding the strategic layout, he was not able to find what was the reason either after reading. He put it aside for record-keeping as per usual.

Then he discovered that under it, there was a private letter from Gu Yun to him.

The private letter was in fact only a piece of paper, a line was written without beginning or end: "Have not seen you in a long time, missing you very much."

Gu Yun's letter was either romantic, or obscene, teasing in secret, or in the open. He seldom said 'I miss you' in a serious and proper manner. Chang Geng instantly sobered up, his drowsiness was all gone. He felt that the words on the paper seemed to turn into an arrow passing through his chest, stabbing through him without any resistance.

He wished he could retract all the heroic words he had said before, pushing all the Grand Council and national businesses aside and go to see Gu Yun regardless of reason.

But that was impossible.

Chang Geng suddenly held the note in his hand, then rolled it up carefully a moment later, stored it in his pouch, trying to calm down and read the regulations of the Bank of Long An drawn up by the Grand Council carefully. However, those neat handwriting appeared in front of him, but none of them fell into his eyes. After an incense time, he almost fidgeted, unable to sit still.

Chang Geng no longer hesitated. He grabbed his cloak and said, "Men, prepare my horse!"

When people saw that he was in a hurry, thinking he had

something urgent to do, they immediately prepared a horse and made way for him.

He went to the Zen Room of the Hu Guo Temple, where the mountain and temple was silent, the doors were closed, the autumn wind swept up the dried leaves. There was only a lantern standing in silence at the door. The glow of the fire was a little disordered, a dark lingering scent of sandalwood was everywhere.

Master Liao Ran was already sleeping when Chang Geng rushed in, the scriptures on the table were scattered by the wind. The master was shocked, staring at *Yan Wang* wrapped in the cold wind with wide eyes.

Chang Geng, with a little red mark at the bottom of his eyes, sat down and asked, "Tea, do you have any?"

Liao Ran put on his monk robe, bringing out from the old wooden cabinet a pack of Kuding tea in a paper bag, and boiled the water.

Although there was a leak in the broken house and a hole in the cup and bowl, the monk prepared the tea with movements that were neither fast nor slow, gentle and quiet, without making any eye contact with him. The dense white steam rose up, reminding one of the roaring fire engines of the steel armors. It quickly condensed into water beads on the low roof, slowly sliding to the tail along the special beams and columns on the roof, falling into the hanging small bowl, making a ticking sound

Chang Geng's eyes followed the process from the steam to water drop, starting from the old pottery pot, and finally fell on the small bowl in the corner of the monk's house roof. Chang Geng breathed out gently, his restless heart that resembled boiling water slowly settled.

Master Liao Ran made a cup of Kuding tea with boiling water and placed it in front of Chang Geng.

It was bitter from the scent alone.

"Thank you." Chang Geng received it. His fingers that were cold from riding in the night wind had regained some sensation. He took a sip. It was both bitter and hot, numbing the tip of his tongue. He smiled bitterly and said, "I was so busy these days, having a bit of a temper, I was not able to suppress the Bone of Impurity. How embarrassing."

Liao Ran looks at him and signed: "The Westerners are good at taking advantage of the situation, but this time they have chosen a very bad time, which shows that although they seem to be fierce, in fact they are at their last leg. Marshal Gu was more than adequate even when handling all four sides, let alone just one Liangjiang battlefield? Once the train track is completed, a large number of people and things can travel back and forth the capital and Jiangbei in one day. With the current reserved Ziliujin of our army, if we are lucky, perhaps we can completely recover the lost land in a year or two. Your Highness needn't be worried."

The logic was all correct. Even Chang Geng himself knew it, yet he still had an incomprehensible feeling of discomfort inside.

"Is Xiao Cao at Master Du's?" Chang Geng whispered, "It should not be far from Liangjiang. Go see him for me... Or I'll write a letter later and let Xiao Cao take a position in the army. His unpredictable method of disguise is useless when staying beside Master Du. It's better to be on the frontline. "

Liao Ran nodded and said: "Your Highness did not want to let Marshal Gu go back to the capital. Isn't this an opportunity?"

Gu Yun was the weakness of *Yan Wang,* but this weak point has never been attacked before. Due to the war, no one could touch Gu Yun at present. Although Li Feng was mediocre, he was not blind to the point of destroying the city wall himself for the second time and be surrounded by the enemy.

This bloody battlefield was not necessarily a kind of protection for Gu Yun.

Chang Geng frowned and drank up the cup of Kuding tea, murmuring: "Everyone depends on him, but who will care about his

whole body of illness and injury? Sometimes when I think about it, it's really…"

When he said this, he inadvertently met the mute monk's compassionate and pitiful eyes, he immediately bowed his head with restraint and smiled, "I have said too much, I should mix more tranquilizer."

Liao Ran saw that he only wanted a moment of quiet, so he stopped talking, taking out the wooden fish knocker under the table, closed his eyes slightly, and knocked it from time to time. In the small monk's house, there was only the sound of wooden fish knocker and water drops. In this sound, Chang Geng sat on the side of the small couch, closing his eyes to rest, only until dawn did he take his leave.

When he was about to go, Liao Ran suddenly tapped on the wooden table, attracted Chang Geng's eyes, and said to him: "Your Highness, when you met Master Du, I was lucky enough to listen, but there was something I was not able to figure out."

Chang Geng's eyes with slightly darkened circles trembled, he raised one eyebrow.

Liao Ran said: "Your Highness said that the interests in the world add up to a big cake, everyone wants to occupy a piece. There is no difference between good and evil, but some people want to occupy more by following the trend. They can push the cake to become bigger while expanding their influence. This kind of person can lay the foundation for a country. Some people do it against the trend. The place he occupies has already been rotten, but he still wants other places to suffer the same fate. This kind of person can only bring disaster. Now most of the cakes fall on the hand of the old nobles. What we want is to break this situation and scrape away the rot on the nation bit by bit-"

Chang Geng asked, "What's the matter, master? Is there something wrong with this?"

"No," Liao Ran said, shaking his head, the broad sleeve of his robe made a rustling sound with his gestures. "I just thought that under

the heaven, everywhere is the ruler's land. The old Drumming Order and Rong Jin Law are still there. Your Highness has worked hard to manage all these things, but perhaps they will all be completely changed with only one law, everything you have done, will become nothing but a fleeting dream."

Chang Geng's fingers on the small table tapped a few times, there was no movement on his face. It seemed that he had soon considered what Liao Ran spoke of.

"The master is very correct." He lowered his handsome eyes, and laughed softly.

His side profile truly resembled a totem of the evil god.

Liao Ran's heart beat wildly twice. For a moment, his mouth was dry. Suddenly, he understood — although *Yan Wang* seemed to be fighting for the Emperor's favor with the forces of the old aristocratic family, in fact, is his real intention behind it really like this?

Chapter 120: Hope

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"*The old man on the opposite side thinks he's very good at fighting along the sea? I'll show him the difference between a general and a marshal."*

—

Cao Chun Hua did not dare to delay after receiving the Lin Yuan wooden bird, he handed over the unfinished matters at hand, and soon left for Liangjiang station.

As soon as he approached the station, Cao Chun Hua felt a kind of murderous aura coming from the humid and cold air, with a faint scent of gunsmoke. He couldn't help but straighten his back, no longer humming his song or sending flirtatious looks, trying to appear proper. Only strict guarding could be seen in this area, all the officers and soldiers on duty did not talk to one another, all sides engulfed in silence, only the sounds of shouting coming from the place where the soldiers were training regularly nearby could be heard.

Cao Chun Hua rubbed his eyes and thought he saw another Black Iron Camp.

As soon as he was near the station, a guard on duty stopped him. Cao Chun Hua did not dare to play around under Gu Yun's military authority. He hurriedly took out the passing order issued by the Grand Council. The average age of the guard in that row was no more than 18 or 19 years old. After checking and confirming there was nothing out of order with the pass, he neither flattered nor shown disrespect, another stepped out from the line, leading him to the Marshal's tent. Cao Chun Hua looked back and saw that in the blink of an eye, the team filled up the vacancy for one person, there was no gap at all.

The guard who led the way was a little shy at first. Later, hearing that Cao Chun Hua once followed Gu Yun to clean up the Northern Barbarians, he finally opened the chatterbox: "The Westerners can't get any scrap from Marshal, they couldn't win in direct battlefield either, these days, they have been lingering around several ports of Liangjiang and come to harass us. I heard from the captain, maybe they want to measure their strength with us. Master, don't they all say that our Great Liang has a large amount of land and wealth? Why do foreigners also have so much money?"

"Don't call me 'master', I'm also a servant running errands," Cao Chun Hua waved and said again. "I actually don't understand much about these things either, but I've heard a few words from Master Du. You can see that their warships were specially designed for going out to sea and fighting naval battles. Did our Jiangnan Port and Dagu port not get destroyed in one move that year? Even our army is like this, let alone those small countries on the sea. Whenever they razed down one place, they will completely 'devour' that place, plunder local materials, open factories that cannot be opened within their country, and force the prisoners to work for them, wring out their blood. Over time, there will be money."

The guard was silent for a moment and led Cao Chun Hua all the way to Gu Yun's tent.

The guard at the gate went in to report back. The young guard took the time to tell Cao Chun Hua, "Sir, before, I heard the old soldiers talk about the Liangjiang garrison of the past, saying that when they were under General Zhao, salaries were high and work was little, the daily training was also lighter than garrisons of other areas, and when there is no mission, they can even cross the strait and enjoy the apricot blossoms and the misty rain. At that time, I felt that I was born in the wrong era, if it was peacetime, perhaps I can even climb onto the 'military master' position."

Cao Chun Hua looked back at him, and the little guard smiled a little sheepishly. "Today, hearing this from you, I felt that I was short-sighted. Those who can hold swords are still luckier than those who can only wait to be driven away by others."

Just then, a personal guard of the Marshal tent came out and

said, "Master Cao, please, Marshal invited you to come in."

Cao Chun Hua came back to his senses and walked into the Marshal tent. At a glance, he saw Gu Yun wearing a particularly coquettish *liuli* glass on the bridge of his nose. The carved patterns behind the mirror outshone the wearer, almost covering his face from the bridge of his nose all the way to his temple. It did not appear like a *liuli* glass, but more like a mask.

Cao Chun Hua was stunned, and the first reaction in his mind was "*What happened to Marshal's eyes?*".

But there was official business being discussed in the Marshal tent, Cao Chun Hua did not dare to disturb.

Shen Yi and Yao Zhen were both here. Yao Zhen was reading a letter from the Westerners: "Those foreigners said that they came to inquire in good faith in the spirit of friendship and harmony, asking if they could divide the four counties in Jiangnan into trading areas, allowing the garrison to exercise self-government, protect the interests of foreign businessmen, and in the future, this place can become the link of shipping and commerce between the two sides...Oh, they also say that they love this land deeply and don't want to let the good fertile land be poisoned by war any longer."

Shen Yi: "Yesterday, there were three counties. How come there is another one added today?"

Yao Zhen sent him a helpless look: "Maybe it's because of their 'deep love'."

"Fuck them." Gu Yun's face was wearing an elegant *liuli* glass, but his words did not resemble those of a good-natured person, "Love my ass, is it their turn to love?"

Shen Yi: "..."

No one was able to answer.

Cao Chun Hua couldn't help it for a moment, laughing aloud.

Shen Yi hurriedly waved at him and said, "Xiao Cao is here!

We've been waiting for you for a long time. Come here and tell us, when will our 'iron snake' be built?"

"Ah, Master Shen, that name is a bit hard to hear... It will be soon," Cao Chun Hua replied briskly, "The thing we have in abundance is the workers. The northern part has been basically completed, and the southern part is even better. In winter, there is no need to stop the construction either. When the parts are connected, the steam car can run from the capital to the riverside. I've heard from Master Du that if it goes well, it will be finished before the end of the year as soon as possible — by the way, how come Marshal is wearing *liuli* glass?"

"Is it pretty?" Gu Yun smiled at him, the corners of his peach blossom eye was as if they were about to fly. He said shamelessly, "I dropped one the other day. This time I found someone to change the frame, asking a famous artisan of Yangzhou to carve it in person. I really don't have the heart to hide something this beautiful, thus I must wear it every day for everyone to see."

Shen Yi felt his stomach ache, "Oh my Marshal, you'd better put it away. The eyes of us mortals are not worthy of such beauty."

Gu Yun ignored him and turned to let Cao Chun Hua have a full look at it, spilling nonsense: "If it does not work out, I will go out and play a beauty trick myself. I'm afraid it won't be able to deal with a million soldiers, but thirty or twenty thousand are easy, isn't that right, Xiao Cao?"

Cao Chun Hua's face blushed red in an instant.

Shen Yi and Yao Zhen each turned their face in a different direction, unable to look straight at him.

"You came just in time," Gu Yun jumped up, wrapping his arm around Cao Chun Hua's shoulders, who was blushing all the way to his ears, and pushed him to the sand table. "I have something that cannot be done by anyone but you, I wanted to ask you to run somewhere for me, help me?"

There was no telling if Marshal Gu's ingenious 'beauty trick' was

effective towards the Westerners or not, but it is very effective to Cao Chun Hua. His face suddenly turned red again, his neck was burning hot, sweating excessively. He felt that no matter what Gu Yun said to him, he could reply 'yes yes yes' to everything.

When Cao Chun Hua came out of the Marshal tent in a daze, he finally startled. *Wait a minute, didn't Yan Wang send him here to take care of Marshal?*

How come as he just settled down, he was immediately tricked to the southwest border by Marshal in just a few words?

Just now, Gu Yun even told him that this was a top-class secret, as he exits the tent, he must digest it in his stomach, it could not be reported even to the Grand Council.

How was he supposed to explain this after returning!

Shen Yi personally arranged for Cao Chun Hua who had lost his soul, then turned back to find Gu Yun. Yao Zhen has already left. The light in the tent was very dim. Gu Yun put his two long legs on a bench next to him and folded his arms in front of his chest. He didn't know what he was thinking. Since he could no longer hear, he was rid of the many disturbances of being able to see and hear all four sides and could easily focus on his own thoughts.

The cold wind that surged in when Shen Yi opened the door startled him, Gu Yun looked up at him: "Is the preparation done?"

Shen Yi nodded and asked, "Do you actually want to make use Xiao Cao, or are you afraid that he will inform His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*?"

"Am I one to mix up private and official affairs?" Gu Yun lifted his eyebrows, but without waiting for Shen Yi to apologize, he said again, "Both."

Shen Yi: "..."

He had never seen a person who was so divided between public and private.

"When we start the war, there will be changes in the court. Chang Geng should not overly exert himself mentally, this situation is also inevitable. Let him not be distracted by my little mistake here. In addition, Xiao Cao's matter needs someone flexible and trustworthy to deal with," said Gu Yun. "The old man on the opposite side thinks he's very good at fighting along the sea? I'll show him the difference between a *general* and a *marshal*."

Shen Yi was divided into two parts by his words: the left half was the old soldier of the Black Iron Camp, wishing that he could follow his commander with all heart and soul, the right half was nauseous from Gu Yun's sincere boasting, his goosebumps rising. Once again, he was speechless and had to beg: "Zi Xi, even if you're blind, can you at least change to a normal *liuli* glass?"

Gu Yun dressed in armor and readied to go out for camp patrol — the Marshal making daily patrolling in person without missing a day was also a distinguishing feature of Liangjiang camp, even if he was blind.

"No," he replied solemnly with an utmost serious expression, "I want to follow the example of Lan Ling Wang*."

Shen Yi thought that this bastard might not have transferred him here to share his worries, but to be his entertainment!

**Lan Ling Wang, Gao Chang Gong, was a Northern Qi general and a renowned beautiful man with feminine physical appearance thus always wore a horrifying mask when fighting in battles.*

Cao Chun Hua only had time to write one letter to Chang Geng since arriving in Jiangnan, saying that Marshal Gu was busy with military affairs and bullying Teacher Shen every day, everything is alright. After that, there was no news. He didn't know whether Gu Yun had put him to work or whether he was simply forgetting the country due to entertainment. It's impossible for Chang Geng to not be envious when remembering his obsession for men, but he also felt relieved at the same time —— no news was good news. If Cao Chun Hua could obsess over men all day, then perhaps it was as Liao Ran had said, Gu Yun had plenty of strength to handle this situation.

At the same time, Chen Qing Xu also arrived at the capital around Chongyang* Festival.

**September Ninth in lunar calendar.*

Chang Geng spent more than a month in the Grand Council, finally asking for a rare leave of half a day to return home and welcome her.

The first time Gu Yun sent a message to him informing that he had found a copy of 'the secret art of the goddess' with Jia Lai Ying Huo, Chang Geng was very much looking forward to it for a while, like an old demon who had been hiding from the world finally hearing that he could become a regular human. However, after returning to the capital, he made preparations like a storm, dealt with all kinds of political enemies like walking on a tightrope, he truly did not have the mind to worry about anything else. Only until he met Chen Qing Xu here did he pick up this old thought.

Chen Qing Xu never liked to conceal anything or stalling. When she met Chang Geng, before any greetings, she instantly said, "It can be cured."

In these words, Chang Geng was nailed to the spot for a long time, until the breath held in his chest was used to the bottom, he slowly breathed out, and calmly prodded, "Can the deep-rooted disease contracted not long after being born be cured?"

Chen Qing Xu nodded: "Yes."

Chang Geng's hand in the broad sleeve of his side imperial uniform jerked violently, but his voice was still calm and pressing: "People say that the evil god is the combination of two people's flesh and blood, I am two people since birth, how could... Miss Chen be able to separate it?"

Chen Qing Xu rarely showed a smile: "It will take time, I'm afraid Your Highness will have to suffer a bit."

Chang Geng's heart hung in his throat: "Then Zi Xi..."

Chen Qing Xu: "There are related records in the secret arts of the goddess, but the medication system is not the same as ours. I still have a lot of things to confirm on my side, you need to wait until I have sorted them out properly."

Chang Geng took a deep breath. His heart beat so fast that it almost broke out of his chest. For a moment, he forgot what day it is, turning around and wanted to go out, wishing he could let Gu Yun know immediately. After two steps, he stopped abruptly. He slapped himself on his forehead and thought to himself, *"Am I confused, I can't let him know. The sword in the battlefield has no eyes, the moment he let his guard down, what are we to do if something happens?"*

But with no place to share, His Highness *Yan Wang* secretly did something that could make people blush. After helping Miss Chen settled down, he walked back to the Marquis' Manor at night, wrote a letter in Gu Yun's room, after drying the ink, he did not send it out but placed it under Gu Yun's pillow.

But this was not enough to satiate his craving, he brought out all the letters that Gu Yun had written for him that he had secretly stored like a treasure. Lying in bed, he recalled all kinds of words that person had said before in his mind, entertaining himself and put together a 'reply letter' from Gu Yun, finding joy in playing his role.

For the next few days, Chang Geng was able to feel more comfortable meeting Fang Qin in the daytime.

Unfortunately, Fang Qin's life was not very easy.

These days, the plea for *Yan Wang*'s impeachment stacked up to about two feet high on Li Feng's desk. If one read through carefully, they would feel that *Yan Wang* was very easy to blame. Even if he coughed on the road, someone would accuse him of how his coughing posture deceived the ruler. However, in sharp contrast, starting from the Grand Council, no one could tell whether all the new officials were drowning by the mountain of affairs, or simply dormant, they began to change their aggressiveness in rebuttal from before, each individual began to concede.

Li Feng's attitude was that he had no attitude, especially when he came across some characters that relied on their old age to always mention the former emperor or even Emperor Wu.

In this case, the one who was most anxious was not the Grand Council, but Fang Qin.

In fact, Fang Qin was extremely opposed to this kind of banding together behavior: "The emperor's mind is like a mirror. Aggressively oppressing the other side like this, are you gentlemen not afraid of losing the emperor's favor?"

As he said this, someone instantly replied: "Lord Fang, you always brought up the emperor's favor and this and that, your vision has become somewhat shallow. Remember that year, the former emperor was only the son of a Jun Wang belonging to a sub-branch of the Li that does not stand out at all, what did he rely on to easily become the owner of the Forbidden Palace? In support of the former emperor that year, our ancestors had cast aside the opinion of the majority, becoming the spearhead, their merits were incredibly grand. The Red Imperial Edict and Iron Plaque* are still in my family's altar, what, now that their children had a steady seat on this nation, are you going to put away the bow as there is no more bird?"

**A type of certificate to display exclusive rights that emperors granted for very important officials.*

Another one cut in: "If we are truly forced to the absolute limit, why don't we just ask for the memorial tablet of the first emperor? Can the Son of Heaven dare to commit this great crime and ignore the ancestral legislation?"

Fang Qin took a deep breath and shouted, "Gentlemen, please be careful of your words!"

Out of respect for him, they no longer said anything more, but their expressions were neither pleased or convinced.

Great Liang's aristocrats and ministers, regardless of the official position of the head of the family, could all dazzle one another when bringing out their family tree. There were many connected in-laws in

the family. Each generation had close involvement with the royal family's many fights for power. If the family could flourish to this day, at least the previous generations had chosen the right person to support. Over time, they all had the illusion that 'it was thanks to the support of my family that the emperor was able to ascend the throne'.

On regular days, due to the Fang family's honor, people were willing to listen to him, but when it came to large argument, although Fang's family could be seen to be the head of all noble families, it's difficult to really and effectively suppress or control anyone — everyone here was related, and no one was nobler than the other. What did the Fang's family have to rely on to take charge of things involving everyone heads and vital interests?

Fang Qin had no choice but to use logic to reason and advice: "His Majesty favors grand merits, the thing he despised the most was others challenging his authority. This time, the Westerner's invasion reminds him of the siege of the capital that year. If he hesitated before, then he must be determined to fight this war now. Why should we charge into this mess and bear the reputation of disaster to the country and the people at this time? I ask you all to think about it at a different angle!"

He sighed, then slowed down his voice: "If we can endure through this period, when the war is over, with no battle, the Grand Council will inevitably face reorganization or abolition. Those people may not be willing to accept it, they will certainly do something. At that time, the emperor would see that their arms are reaching too far. When you think about the Drumming Order and the Rong Jin Law in those days, you will know what is the real intention of His Majesty. At this time, making use of those lowly merchants was only a temporary solution. When they have nothing left to be used, would His Majesty still protect them then? I'm afraid when the time comes, even Gu Yun would have to return the Black Tiger Emblem. It's impossible for the Grand Council to single-handedly cover up the sky all the time."

Fang Qin thought that he had analyzed it carefully, advising to the best of his ability.

However, among the crowd of nobles packed in this room, not

everyone knew how to look forward — the man who just now spilled nonsense about how his family had a Red Imperial Edict and Iron Plaque opened his mouth and asked: "Lord Fang's words have its reason, but it is too ideal. You say when the war is over? I ask you, when is it going to be over? A year or two can be counted as 'over', and a decade or two also can be counted as 'over'. Do we have to endure until dirt covered our heads?"

In fact, Fang Qin despised these mobs very much. A large number of these people were the country's giant rats with no achievements, each of them was pretentious, alluding that they were extraordinary. Getting their weak point caught by someone else was also very deserving of them — but unfortunately, he could not express these words, because the fundamental thing that helped him bring these people together was profits. Without profits, even if he howled the great ideal of 'for the country and the people' loudly every day, no one would care.

"Let us not speak of such angry words here, if the war truly did drag on for ten or twenty years, and any national strength will be exhausted, not mentioning anyone else, the emperor won't allow it, and it can never be that long." Fang Qin had to change his view and said, "Allow me to say something from the bottom of my heart: with *Yan Wang*'s status, as long as he doesn't rebel, no one can kill him. However, the same can be said about you gentlemen, with your family background, as long as the emperor was in power for a day, as long as we don't mess things up ourselves, who can shake our foundation?"

This was more pleasant than the line 'if you do not seek death yourself, no one can kill you'. Although it's the same meaning, it also scratched the itch the ministers presented. Fang Qin truly was worthy of being the head of Great Liang's noble families, he has been around with these people for decades and has excessive experience.

Sure enough, under his efforts, the imperial court had become considerably more peaceful. The two factions seemed to temporarily retract their weapons, all contradictions were swept under the table, and the internal force of Great Liang ushered in a few months of temporary peace.

For more than three months——

Then an accident happened that caused all of Fang Qin's previous efforts to be for naught.

Chapter 121: Flickering

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This chapter is generally about fighting don't buy if you're not interested
-priest

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On the eighth day of the twelfth lunar month, Gu Yun secretly sent envoys to ‘visit’ the Dongying and Nanyang islands. So far, the front line had been on a stalemate for more than three months. Some fronts had been expanded under the constant struggle of both sides, the flame of war had spread from Jiangbei to the thirteen counties in Jiangnan, even to Guangdong and Guangxi.

A large number of people who refused to abandon their ancestors' land and cross the river began to form their own militia. Although the common folk mechanics did not have *Ziliujin*, they tried every way to replace it with coal and explosive powder as fuel, and forged a number of less fancy military equipment in various ways.

These equipment did not have much variety, hence Ling Shu Institute announced the establishment of many branches all over the country to exchange and teach technologies outside of the highly confidential military type.

The far-reaching impact of the war also gradually emerged.

Fang Qin never thought that it wasn't the *Yan Wang* Party that would break the peace in the court, but the pure officials of the two courts——

Great Liang's Autumn Examination hosted once every three years happened this year. Because of the war, it was interrupted in the middle, then continued to be delayed for some time; only until January did the names of the people who passed were released, gathered into a "Plum List", which was nicknamed "Moldy List" by scholars all over the country.

”Plum(梅)” and “Mold(霉)” are homophones, both pronounced as méi

Less than three days after the announcement, a scholar in Shaanxi Province committed suicide. The officials dared not let troubles happen at this key moment, trying their best not to report it to the superiors. However, suppressing it for a few days, when the grand meeting of the imperial court was dismissed, someone stopped at the gate of the imperial platform wanting to report it to the emperor.

This was a long story.

Yan Wang went to Jiangnan twice, cut off countless heads, and issued the most severe administrative governance* to date, which made the serious and ever-growing problem of corruption in Great Liang from the Yuan He Dynasty to decline for a while. In these few years of war, even the Imperial Palace was tightening the spending, the official salaries had to be reduced again and again, plus the Feng Huo tickets had made it worse, being closely linked with the assessment of the administrative governance; it was no different than closing the source but opening the outlet. The life of officials had never been so difficult in the past hundreds of years.

**in an administrative governance(吏治), the ministers and other members of the court are merely civil servants who can only implement policy, but not make them*

There was a saying: it was easy to go from poverty to extravagance, but difficult the other way around. When it involves the large possessions of gold and silver, no one would care about ‘everyone is responsible for the rise and fall of the country’.

But even if life was difficult, there's no other way. No one dared to receive gifts. Everyone knew that *Yan Wang* was behind the rich merchants, receiving something incorrectly would perhaps turn the gift into a life-claiming token. No one dared to dip their hands in the military expenses. The taxes after the reform was also impossible to touch, and there was no need to mention the relief funds for natural disasters, the heads of Yang Rong Gui and his party had yet to become bones.

Fortunately, this year's Autumn Examination was not at the point of attention. The whole country was busy fighting the war and earning money, no one cared about these useless scholars, thus someone immediately came up with a vile scheme.

As a result, pulling out the radish dragging the mud with it, implicating a big fraud case involving nine provinces, shocking the whole country.

Fang Qin managed to press down many shit-stirring sticks around him with difficulty; he had yet to enjoy a few days of peace, but was already covered with papers from the two courts falling like snow.

Those pure officials were different from the *Yan Wang* Party: the *Yan Wang* party had always been pragmatic and had a purpose for all their activities, they fought for power in an orderly manner, many of their actions could be predictable; but these ‘clean’ people, who have eyes higher than the top of their heads, regarded fame and wealth as garbage, were all ‘revealing crimes simply for the sake of revealing crimes’ — this was something they did. Their personal fame was closely related to the number of people they personally dragged down.

The young masters and nobles rarely ever entered these two courts, thus a majority of these monsters came from poor students, and what the fraud in this imperial examination touched was also the interest of poor students.

The mad dogs in the two courts who haven't bitten anyone in a long time seemed to have their tails stepped on, barking loudly. They screamed and scolded in a variety of ways every day, forcing Li Feng to investigate strictly; it seemed as if they were not satisfied with the investigation, they would line up and knock their heads on the column in the middle of the court to die altogether for the emperor to see.

The brief and false peace was broken.

Nine provincial officials, there was no telling how many intricate relationships were involved in it, even including Fang Qin's good for nothing younger brother.

The youngest child and the eldest grandson were the raison d'être of an old man. Even Grand Scholar Fang, who no longer cared about the world for a long time, was shocked. Fang Qin could turn faces with anyone, but not with his own father, his mind was in an entangled mess.

But without waiting for Fang Qin to think of a solution, this time, not knowing whether it was intentional or not, the emperor directly jumped over Da Li temple and the inspector's office and sent this case to the Grand Council instead, letting Jiang Chong lead the investigation, the others could only cooperate.

Paper could no longer contain fire.

Although Fang Qin was born into a rich family, before, he always harbored the hope of being able to shine bright for generations and therefore refused to throw away his dignity and commit dirty deeds with his party. For this reason, he first abandoned Lu Chang, who dared to intimidate him, then abandoned the old fool, Wang Guo. At present, he was finally at the point where he could no longer abandon any one — his mother was still bedridden in the next door.

After appeasing this person and explaining to the other, when Lord Fang left the door, there was still a group of people waiting for him to make a decision. He was in a state of anxiety. Just after one night, there were two bleeding blisters on the corner of his mouth. After accompanying his old crying mother, Fang Qin heard that another was coming. He rubbed between his brows and coldly said, "Just say I'm not at home, send them away."

The servant retreated quietly; just then, an adviser came up and whispered, "Is something troubling Master Fang?"

Fang Qin sent him an angry look. Fortunately, with his excellent self-control, he soon hid his gloomy expression and said slowly: "The scholar rebelled unsuccessfully for three years. This time, from when the accident occurred to reporting to the imperial state of the capital, it all happened too fast. It was almost as if someone was assisting… that Li Min's outward appearance was all clear and bright, only daring to stab people under the table. This kind of person with a kind face but a dark heart could only deceive the emperor. "

The adviser asked again, "Does Master have a plan in mind?"

Fang Qin was currently very irritated — if he knew ahead of time, even if it's only one day ahead, there's still a little room for maneuver. But the speed of the outbreak was too fast. The emperor knew earlier than him, which directly put Fang Qin into a very difficult situation.

Fang Qin sighed: "It is very tricky, *Yan Wang*'s type is of tigers and wolves. Once he catches the prey's neck, he won't let it go again."

"I heard that His Highness *Yan Wang*'s reform has not been completely finished, and there are hundreds of disputes in the court. I think he is too hasty. This step is how his intelligence backfired at him."

Fang Qin stopped his steps, he could see that the man next to him was beating around the bush with the intention of baiting him. Fang's Manor raised a lot of advisers, but most of them could only accompany the old scholar Fang in playing chess. There were few who had the intellect to open their mouths in front of Fang Qin. It's rare to be able to seize a chance, of course, the adviser would want to let himself be known.

Fang Qin reached out and stroked his beard: "Why did you say so?"

Seeing the opportunity came, the adviser quickly poured out the previously prepared words: "Now that it has come to this, I'm afraid there's no chance to rebuttal the case. Why don't we dig to the root and directly try to abolish the new official law of *Yan Wang*?"

Fang Qin originally assumed he had wise ideas. Hearing this, he cut off the flickering hope in his heart and coldly said, "Cheating in the imperial examination is a serious crime of beheading and losing position no matter the dynasty. What does it have to do with old and new official laws?"

The adviser smiled calmly and said: "My Lord, a greedy person is a greedy person, a cheater is a cheater; but now, it's involved nine provinces and countless important ministers, could this still be a

coincidence? The emperor will also think that there must be some reasons behind it. How could these officials be so vicious? Because these two years are really not easy to live, the refugees must be settled, the taxes must be paid, the military expenditure must be spent, and the quota of the *Feng Huo* tickets must be completed."

Fang Qin's brow slightly moved: "The circulation of *Feng Huo* tickets can be equated with gold and silver, the regulations had been set after the Jiangnan accident. What are you planning to say?"

"It can be equated with gold and silver in circulation, but it doesn't mean it can be equated with gold and silver when handing over to the imperial court," said the adviser, shaking his head. "Moreover, there are many rich businessmen who migrated from the south to Jiangbei, the people's civilization there is relatively premature, but the Central Plains to the northwest are not the same. If they don't accept it, they won't accept it. If the government used force, they will have a chance of running into the commoners who cry and threaten to hang themselves. If something goes wrong, the imperial court has to ask who is responsible? Who is prone to blame and who are the ones that walk on ice? Master, think about it. If you really dare to make this bet, there may be room for salvage. Even if the Third Master is punished and dismissed of his position, as long as the power of the Fang family is still there, who can say he won't be able to rise again in the future?"

Fang Qin listened and was silent.

The adviser said in a low voice, "My Lord, it's hard to know what will happen in the future. We're looking forward to the end of the war to turn over the old debt. Of course, *Yan Wang*'s side would also predict this. Don't say 'not fighting is fighting'. If you don't take the initiative to move, you can only be forced to die by them — this follower had said too much today, Master, please pardon me, I will take my leave."

On the sixteenth of the twelfth lunar month, when the governor of Shaanxi government, one of the masterminds involved in the case, was tried, he was really crying out in court that his jurisdiction was poor and weak, thus it was difficult to promote the *Feng Huo* tickets, so the local government could only buy by it themselves. The court

also sent down three decrees of quota in succession, unable to fulfill them, they could only borrow from everywhere, yet there was no real income, they had to make such a lowly decision.

As soon as these words came out, it was a stone that stirred up a thousand waves. All the guilty ministers all spoke of the same and pulled down *Yan Wang*'s party that was originally watching from the sideline. Some even spilled nonsense: Cheating in the imperial examination was equal to selling and buying position, then linking the official reform with the *Feng Huo* tickets, was that any different from selling position?

This new year has passed by in a scuffle, no one had the peace of mind to eat dumplings.

At the end of the day, the Grand Council had to write an apology letter, officially announced the abolition of the laws that involved the Feng Huo tickets in the new official reform, and suspended the sale of the Feng Huo tickets for the time being.

However, with the war going on, to prevent the imperial court to once again falling in a situation of having no money available, the Grand Council took the opportunity to put forward the idea of stopping the official casting of silver, following the Westerners' policy of '*jiaozi**' in the occupied land and the previous dynasty, let the Bank of Long An issue a special type of 'temporary silver' to use in place of gold and silver coins, and drew up a series of new regulations, sending together with the apology letter.

As long as the new regulations were feasible, everyone had no opinion on whether it was 'iron *jiaozi*' or 'paper *tongbao***", but it could never be controlled by the Grand Council.

**A type of paper money issued in Sichuan in the Song dynasty.*
***tongbao: A way to call coin money.*

So at this time, the steam rail that was about to be formed had unexpected problems.

The north and south sections have been basically connected, only the middle section was left. If they were connected, the work will be

completed. However, the last section had been delayed for more than a month and dared not start construction. The problem laid on the land.

Most of the land along the line had been reserved, but it was impossible for such a long area of land to be all without an owner. If it was private property, it will be bought at market price by the Canal Office. At the same time, it would give some other subsidies, such as tax relief and so on. There were also people not willing to sell their ancestral property, thus the court will rent it instead and write down the lease and pay the rent every year.

Since the year of Yuan He dynasty, the government of Great Liang had paid attention to being a benevolent government, strict with civil and military officials, but very polite to common villagers. Because of this politeness, there was a fatal omission in this lease — it only stated the lease term, not what would happen if the original owner no longer wanted to rent.

They didn't expect that someone would destroy the imperial court's agreement.

And the last part of the road happened to be a large piece of rented land. The original owner was a major landlord, doing other businesses in his family. They had already come to an agreement; although the construction had not reached this place, the rent has been paid.

Unexpectedly, the man suddenly repented and returned all the money without missing a coin. Although this person had no official position, the force behind him was powerful and large, closely related to family of Imperial Duke Zhao. As soon as he retreated, no one dared to slap his face. He completely avoided the Canal Office's people coming to see him, hence it was too late for the steam rail to change its course, they had to make a big circle to go around it.

Due to the stagnation of the steam rail, Gu Yun wrote several letters asking for the completion date. At last, he sent it straight to Li Feng and said that the materials on the front line could not keep up, if this continued, he would be forced to shrink the front line.

Fang Qin's youngest brother hadn't cleaned himself up yet. At this time, Grand Scholar Fang finally expressed his clear dissatisfaction with his son's ‘excessive worry’ and ‘lack of skill’, and began to make his move.

The man who was once the examination teacher of half the court did two things at the same time.

First of all, he secretly met with the foreign affairs official of the imperial court who made contact with the Western envoys. He suggested that the national strength of Great Liang might not be enough to support the long-term war with the Westerners at this time. If they fought on like this, it would only be a waste of resources, hurting both sides. The great achievement did not fall on the butcher in battle, but the one who could eventually promote peace treaty, the one who could return peace to the nation.

The foreign affairs officer, once a student of Grand Scholar Fang, asked cautiously, "Teacher, if the emperor is determined to fight, how can we, as subjects, be able to push him?"

"It depends on how you talk to the Westerners." Grand Scholar Fang's appearance bore the aura of someone who practiced cultivation, speaking with deep meaning, "What they want is nothing more than benefits. Do you think they are willing to continue to fight with Gu Yun to the death, or are they willing to step back and cooperate with our court's pro-peace faction to achieve an early armistice and mutual friendship? The emperor and the court want dignity. If the foreigners really are sincere and will save them faces, we won't be stingy, is that not right? Without the frontline battle as an excuse, I don't believe the emperor will let Yan Wang continue to do as he pleases."

Sending away the foreign affairs officer who seem to had just woke up from his dream, he then asked his wife to invite someone — it was Emperor Long An's nanny, who was once very well looked after by his wife after she left the palace to retire.

Li Feng loved his nanny very much. He was originally talking to Chang Geng about business; hearing that the nanny delivered the plaque asking to enter the palace to visit the sick queen, he hurriedly

instructed Chang Geng and rushed to the back palace.

Chang Geng left the palace slowly. The whole palace was shrouded in the sunset. The gold glint on thousands of glazed tiles disappeared in the hue. There was a little ice slag on the edge, which was not easy to detect, appearing very cold and distant.

The weather was so cold, yet the capital was so hot.

In recent days, the front line had become more and more tense, Gu Yun's letters have also been reduced. The rambling chatter was almost gone. There were only a few private letters occasionally, containing only a few words.

Chang Geng slowly breathed out and stood under the red wall for a while, thinking, "*The day after tomorrow is the sixteenth day of January.*"

However, the mist that engulfed the country still has not seen signs of being dispelled.

Although *that* result was getting closer and closer in his step-by-step planning, he was still in a state of panic every once in a while.

At this time, a team of guards passed by, saw him, and hurriedly came forward to greet: "Your Highness."

Chang Geng did not say a word, staring at the guards for a moment, then as if struck by a spell, he immediately walked away.

"I want to see Gu Zi Xi," he thought, *"Right now."*

Chapter 122: Return in a dream

T/N: Happy Lunar New Year~ Let's welcome the Year of the Rat with a hopeful chapter □ 👊 💀

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With Gu Yun's music of making ghosts and gods cry at his side, even if there were all kinds of demons in front of him, he could be fearless.

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In one's life, there was always a moment when one cannot contain anything in mind except for an absurd idea for no reason. A strong desire seems to devour the whole spirit, even if reason outside the brain risked its life to stretched its claws and scratch the door.

For example, many years ago, when Gu Yun's head was delirious from fever in the wild northwest, he thought of resigning from his position and wandering around the world.

For example, many years later, Chang Geng came out of the imperial palace with the breeze and snow, only wanted to see Gu Yun who was thousands of miles away.

Chang Geng ran back to the Marquis's manor without thinking. Two iron puppets at the door turned around and watched him silently. As soon as he met the purple light in the puppet's eyes, his steps suddenly stopped.

Chang Geng and the two iron monsters looked at each other for a long time; he finally slowly recovered from the state of almost succumbing into madness. With a sigh, he reached out and touched the ice cold arm of the iron puppet, slowly lowered his head and bowed down, breathing out a dense white mist.

In the past, they separated then reunited, there was a time when they didn't see each other for four years, yet it did not seem to be as difficult as this moment. Chang Geng himself didn't know whether he was becoming more fragile, or whether he was becoming more and

more greedy for Gu Yun. There seemed to be a string in his heart; ever since Gu Yun suddenly wrote a letter saying that he missed him, it began to tense up.

When every thrilling battle in the south reached the capital, the string would become tighter. When the situation in the court became more dangerous and complicated, it would also become a bit tighter. Until it suddenly broke at this moment without warning.

At this time, the gate opened from the inside, it was the manor guard captain Huo Dan.

Huo Dan saw Chang Geng's strange expression and was surprised: "Uncle Wang is asking me to find you, Your Highness. What's the matter?"

Chang Geng's eyes were slightly red, but he adjusted a smile in the fastest time, he patted away the snowflakes on his body: "Nothing, I was dizzy from running too fast. What does Uncle Wang need me for?"

Huo Dan was a crude man. He didn't see anything unusual after hearing it, he helped him up and whispered in his ear: "There is a guest who is inconvenient to appear. He said he has an urgent matter to report. He was unable to come to the Grand Council to meet and can only come to the Marquis's manor."

The visitor was a man of about thirty-four or thirty-five. Chang Geng didn't know him, but he must have met him somewhere, he seemed familiar. As he adjusted his disordered mental state, he tried to recall the identity of the guest.

Fortunately, the man himself came forward and said, "I am Liu Zhong, deputy governor of the Foreign Affairs Mission, greeting to Your Highness."

The so-called "Foreign Affairs Mission" was built by a group of pro-peace factions from the Ministry of War, using a connection they have with Honglu Temple, it was built by their joint effort. For fear of touching Emperor Long An's temper, they did not even dare call themselves "peace envoy", they had to bear the half-ass name of

"Foreign Affairs Mission", raised the banner of "one civil, one militant", finding some bullshit reason to go on the front line to "make the enemy retreat through other ways"; this was purely with the intention of making trouble for Gu Yun.

Chang Geng frowned. He had just met this person, but his impression of the man was already bad. He did not show it in his demeanor for fear of a lack of grace. He said with indifference, "Master Liu is about to depart on your mission, visiting in the middle of the night like this, is there something important?"

Liu Zhong suddenly stepped back and knelt down, raising one hand to the heavens and said, "If this lowly official speak of any false statement today, I will be struck by lightning, and my parents will not be at peace in the afterlife."

Chang Geng turned aside in avoidance for half a step: "What is Master Liu doing? Hurry and stand up."

Liu Zhong refused: "Do you know that the supervisor of our regiment, my direct superior, used to be a student of Grand Scholar Fang that year?"

Of course, Chang Geng knew, not only did he knew, but he was also disgusted for a long time. If it wasn't for the lack of skills, he wished nothing more than to capture all the traitors that supported the Foreign Affairs Mission and chop them to pieces.

"Your Highness, please allow me to report." Liu Zhong quickly explained to Chang Geng what Grand Scholar Fang had secretly told the foreign affairs officer, "Currently, only a few of the trusted confidants of the supervisor know about this matter, this lowly official is incompetent, I am also one of them."

Chang Geng's fingers tapped the table beside him: "Visiting the manor in the middle of the night is not the action of a trusted confidant, is it now?"

Liu Zhong gave a grand courtesy: "This servant's ancestral home is Hangzhou. My parents died early. I grew up with the elders of my family when I was a child. Later, I went to study in all directions and

also worked as an adviser for the rank of nobility many times. I met with the elders of the Fang's family by fate, having affinity with them, they recommended me to be an official. Of course, it is hard to repay his kindness."

Chang Geng raised his eyebrows lightly.

"When I was a child, I had a childhood sweetheart. The two of us were young and innocent. We were already engaged and waited to be wed." Liu Zhong buried his head very low and shrunk his shoulders. "I wanted to wait until I succeed in my career and to go back to my hometown to ask for her hand in marriage. But before that day could come, the ferocious enemy had suddenly attacked..."

Liu Zhong bowed his head and wiped his face then kowtowed heavily to him: "Although the dead are already dead, the living are always unable to let go of anger. Thank you for your mercy."

Chang Geng sighed softly: "Master Liu, get up first then talk."

The two discussed in secret for a long time. When they saw Liu Zhong off, there was already a sound of night patrol on the street. Chang Geng stood at the door for a moment, pinched the center of his brows and said to Huo Dan, "May I ask the commander to go see if Miss Chen had slept yet; if she hasn't, please invite her here."

Chen Qing Xu had been staying as a guest in the Marquis's manor these days, ready to try and start on the treatment for Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity. But it would be a long process, *Yan Wang* never had any free time, he did not return even after half a month.

When Chen Qing Xu saw Chang Geng, feeling that his complexion was already very bad, she said, "Your Highness, the more serious you are thinking, the more difficult it would be to control yourself. Have you been too exhausted recently?"

Chang Geng smiled bitterly. He ignited the contradiction too

soon, in fact, there were many things that had not yet finished preparing. Every step was dangerous. He didn't know when he would slip on this vertical cliff.

But he had ran out of time.

He was afraid that his enemies would not give him time, that Gu Yun would only report the good news but not the bad, that he would steel himself to suffer from what he did not know in a place where he could not see.

Chang Geng: "If it's convenient for Miss Chen, you can start applying needles from today."

Chen Qing Xu was stunned: "The process may be very painful. Your Highness is busy with the court during the day. Will you be able to bear it?"

Chang Geng shook his head: "I don't know, but I always have a bad feeling. In recent days, it's more and more difficult to suppress. Let's just say we won't be able to rebuild if we don't break it down first."

One hour later, Chang Geng realized that he had underestimated the word ‘pain’ that Chen Qing Xu mentioned.

Chen Qing Xu brought a bowl of medicine soup to him and prepared the silver needles.

Chang Geng reached for it and asked, "What is this?"

"I will make a copy of the prescription for your highness when you are no longer trapped by Bone of Impurity," said Chen Qing Xu, "But it is better for you not to ask before drinking."

Chang Geng: "..."

He didn’t know why, but in his impression, all the things related to the barbarian's voodoo were full of the gloomy smell of corpse oil. After hearing this, Chang Geng suddenly had countless of terrible thoughts. He immediately stopped asking questions, curled up his tongue as much as possible, and drank with his nose pinched.

Chen Qing Xu bent over to light a tranquilizer, the quiet cold fragrance spread in the room. She sat cross-legged three steps away from him, and said in a serious manner, "Your Highness, after I start to apply needles, you must keep your mental state clear all the time, otherwise no one will be able to wake you up. Do you understand?"

Chang Geng nodded.

Chen Qing Xu: "I will start when this tranquilizing incense is burnt out. Please use this incense to clear your mind and eliminate all distractions."

At first, there was no sensation. Chen Qing Xu's needles were steady and accurate. Her hands were very fast. Chang Geng only closed his eyes. Suddenly, a chill of fear rose from behind him - the type of fear when seeing someone raised a weapon yet he could not avoid and could only await his death. The muscles in his back contracted involuntarily. Although he could not move, he made a subconscious action of avoidance.

Chen Qing Xu's needles could not go through at once; she appeared much more serious: "Your Highness."

Chang Geng felt an invisible whip lashing on his back, there was a murmur in his ears, the shouting and cursing of the woman who was gone for more than ten years exploded in his ears.

Amidst the long years of nightmares, Chen Qing Xu's voice mingled with tranquilizer stabbed into his ear: "Your Highness, this is the Marquis's manor. Can you hear me?"

Chang Geng, with all his strength, gave a little nod.

Chen Qing Xu sent the next silver needle in; the second tranquilizing incense was burnt out. She looked at the Western clock on the table, "This is just the beginning, Your Highness, do you need time to adapt to it?"

Chang Geng bit the tip of his tongue: "No, go on."

Chen Qing Xu no longer talked nonsense, her movement swift. The illusion that had just faded was coming back again. All kinds of

injuries imposed on him by Xiu Niang in his childhood reappeared one by one.

Chen Qing Xu 's face was filled with tension. She saw an old scar on Chang Geng' s clavicle suddenly reddened and swell without any reason. A thin row of blood oozed out. The blood vessels resembling cobwebs underneath his skin split on both sides, appearing very ferocious.

"Your Highness, Your Highness *Yan Wang*!" Chen Qing Xu called him.

Chang Geng did not react.

Chen Qing Xu did not dare to continue. Suddenly, she saw a pair of iron shoulder armor hanging on the foot of the bed. It looked like it was from a long time ago. Now, the steel armor in the army had changed its style. Chen Qing Xu suddenly remembered when talking with Chang Geng about the symptom of Bone of Impurity in his early years, he seemed to mention by chance that when he broke away from his nightmare for the first time, it was thanks to the piece of armor Gu Yun hung at the head of the bed.

Chen Qing Xu swept her long sleeves, the iron shoulder made a sound with a clear impact, the sound of metal swept through the quiet room. Chang Geng's increasingly rapid breathing suddenly came to a halt.

There were many obstacles in front of him. First, he was trapped in his own younger body — sharp hairpins, burning red sticks, dirty horsewhip, the woman's hands as sharp as pliers. At the end of everything, there was Gu Yun, half-clad in steel armor, watching him silently, pierce through many years.

Chang Geng stared at him like a life-saving straw, struggling to maintain his own line of clarity. He did not know how long it took for the demonic illusions to gradually get away from him. Chang Geng came back to his senses exhausted, and saw that the tranquilizer fragrance on the table had burned out, Chen Qing Xu was gathering the silver needles.

Only then did he realize that he could move again.

Chen Qing Xu: "How do you feel?"

Chang Geng moved his hand for a while, and saw that there were many small bruises on his arms he did not know where they came from. They had already scabbed and itched a little. He tried to clench his fist. "It's like climbing out once more."

After Chen Qing Xu left, Chang Geng immediately fell asleep. Over the years, his sleep seemed to be a lake surface which could be broken even by a stone. Aside from the loss of blood and being in a coma, he rarely had this feeling of deep sleep, having no nightmares for the first time.

He dreamt of a lofty watchtower. There was a fire in the distance. The camp was heavily guarded, with a sense of ready to battle. A group of soldiers who came back from the camp patrol were tightening their reins. Suddenly, the leader looked back at him: it turned out to be Gu Yun. He wore a *liuli* glass that was flashier than a mask, the silver lining and the dark armor complimented each other, he looked at him and smiled teasingly.

In the dream, Chang Geng said with a laugh, "What on earth are you wearing?"

Gu Yun stretched out a hand on horseback, the metal arm burning *Ziliujn* with the firepower easily pulled him up on the horse, Gu Yun hugged him from behind, laughing and said to his ear, "The military camp is too lonesome, trying to coerce a few little beauties."

People could not cover up their subtle thoughts in their dreams. Knowing what he said was only a joke, Chang Geng's heart was still full of unspeakable grievances: "I've been troubled all night in the capital, for fear of going wrong step by step. I only hoped to hear a few words from you every day, but nothing came."

Gu Yun said helplessly: "Your Highness, you come all the way here to this remote place to act spoiled?"

Chang Geng thought that he was very right. He truly wanted to sulk and pick a fight with Gu Yun, just like what was written in the folk storybook. However, only when one wanted to make use of a knowledge did one find they did not have enough, his skill was very lackluster. At this time, he was a little stuck and didn't know where to start.

Gu Yun raised his hand and took off the *liuli* glass on his face, tilted his head and kissed him on the face: "If you don't like it, I won't wear it anymore."

In the early morning, Chang Geng woke up in Gu Yun's horrifying flute sound. He climbed up and rubbed his eyes. He always felt that the demonic sound seemed to still linger around his ears. He rubbed his sore ears painfully, but the corners of his mouth could not help but curl up.

This was really the best dream of his life.

With Gu Yun's music of making ghosts and gods cry at his side, even if there were all kinds of demons in front of him, he could be fearless.

What Chang Geng didn't know was that the night before, on the front line, when Gu Yun came back from his patrol, he suddenly felt that there was someone behind watching at him. He could not help but turn back his head and dropped the liuli glass on his face. This time, the lens didn't break, but it was the delicate pattern that knocked on his shoulder plate and chipped a corner; he had to admit that this thing is pretty but useless, and replaced it with a regular

one.

The next day, Shen Yi had a good laugh at him when he heard it: "Perhaps it was some god that had their eyes sored by your flirtatious attitude."

"Then that god must be a busybody," Gu Yun said without shame, "Maybe she saw that I am handsome and want to become my wife in a hurry."

Shen Yi: "..."

Before General Shen could vomit out all his dinner the night before, a general came to report: "Marshal, your emissary sent to Dong Ying has replied."

Gu Yun: "Bring it in."

Some of the supplies of the Western army were sent from the open sea with the cooperation of Dong Ying people. In this war, they seemed to have been involved in every aspect, but they were cunningly unwilling to show themselves on the table. Even when Liao Chi was attempting to kidnap Emperor Long An with ten Dong Ying warriors disguised as monks, it was also for his personal resentment. The Dong Ying people did not step out and demand justice for him either.

Shen Yi: "What does it say?"

Gu Yun shook his head: "It's said they are polite and tentative, but their attitude was ambiguous. As soon as the messengers wanted to talk about business, the person in charge would avoid meeting, finding a group of white-faced dancers to accompany them. Dong Ying people have their own calculation in mind. If the foreigners can take root in our country, they will be able to eat a piece of rotten meat. But if the Western warships are defeated, they will still be our neighbor in the future. Therefore, they are not willing to offend us completely."

Shen Yi frowned and said, "Trying to please both sides. What kind of character is this."

"The good kind." Gu Yun said with a smile, "As long as they are indecisive, I can rest assured. It's of great use, just wait and see."

Shen Yi shook his head. "We can't wait anymore. The front line of the south is too long. Ziliujin is too tight. Even if you deploy it, there will come a time when it will no longer be able to keep up. I'm afraid that if we fight like this, there will be talks in the court."

Gu Yun's face faded.

Shen Yi also reminded: "I heard the court thought that fighting head-on is moronic, we should 'hit once with a stick then reward with an apple'. Recently, a new group of foreign affairs envoys are being set up. If these people are really coming with a stick to reward the apple then it's fine, I only fear they come to cause trouble."

Gu Yun pondered for a moment: "When will they arrive?"

"They must be ready to depart soon," Shen Yi replied. "No more than ten days — Zi Xi, what do you want to do?"

Chapter 123: Dawn

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Who said that Great Liang's navy could not fight on the open sea?

—

The Western and Great Liang armies have been locked in battles for a very long time in the frontline, neither of them would yield. They fought countless battles both large and small. Generally speaking, they were almost equal in strength and talent, neither could do anything to the other.

On the 16th day of January, a group of Great Liang's sea jiao warships set out in the early hours of the morning, leaving the port without anyone knowing. Under the situation that the materials have begun to stretch taut, they once again divided their troops and left quietly along the river.

At that time, before dawn, Shen Yi said to Gu Yun in the dark, "You are too adventurous."

Gu Yun did not pay attention to him, giving an unrelated response, "Tell someone to make me a bowl of noodles in the morning, remember to drop an egg in."

Shen Yi was too dizzy from having his hands full, he could not understand for a moment; after a while, he remembered what day it was and muttered, "You're still quite free."

He whispered a few words to the soldiers next to him, then return to the topic and continued to nag: "Didn't you say that we should wait for the track to be finished at least? If the Ziliujin-dedicated rail line is really open, our chance at winning will be higher. If you make a move right now, in case there will be any problems with the cooperation between the two sides, then… It will be too risky!"

"Seeking wealth in danger," Gu Yun said without a shift in expression, "Why should I, a man in his prime condition, be as cautious as the old man on the opposite side?"

Hearing that he was talking nonsense again, Shen Yi said angrily, "Gu Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun sighed and took a look in the north direction. At this time, his eyesight was no longer able to penetrate the mountains and rivers.

"Ji Ping," Gu Yun said in a low voice, "If things in the capital are going smoothly, the enemy would have already get out themselves even if we did not fight. If you think this campaign is a big risk, then do you want them to continue to drag on and wait until an even bigger risk arises in the court?"

Shen Yi was speechless and unable to answer. He was the general in charge of one side. He only needed to arrange troops, not to think about the layout of the four sides, and not to worry about whether there would be wars fifty years from now.

"In any case, this time, we must achieve something before the pro-peace faction had a chance to open its mouth. Once we give those traitors the chance to open their mouths, we don't know how long they will drag it out. The drum of vigor will be exhausted again and again. Even if we have a rest, it can not last more than three or five years. Otherwise, the nobles in the capital will gradually forget the pain after the wound heals. When our generation dies, later generations will think that the southern half of the country was governed by both sides from the start."

Gu Yun glanced at Shen Yi and said, "It's worth taking a risk. At that point, I'll leave the Black Tiger Emblem with you, in case I... You can quickly gather up the rest of the troops, no need to panic. You can immediately transfer the Black Iron camp for temporary support. The Westerners are mostly capable on water, but not fearsome on land, we have room for maneuver. "

Shen Yi's brows wrinkled.

At this time, the soldiers in charge of the kitchen brought the cooked noodles, the person cooking was very attentive to this dish especially made for Marshal: the longevity noodles strands were even, the egg was done just right, broth and meat are both visible,

with a few strands of bamboo shoots soaked in the broth floating inside.

Gu Yun took it; after eating two bites, he suddenly asked, "How come there are no green vegetables?"

"Did you not eat vegetables?" said Shen Yi in surprise.

"When did I say I don't eat them..." Gu Yun murmured and took a few bites. He still felt that there was something missing with this bowl of noodles. After thinking for a while, he realized it.

Turns out, the so-called birthday and festival were only born because of the people. There was someone who was willing to hold a small 'ceremony' for him on such a day, it was another way to express '*I hold you in my heart*'.

In fact, the feeling was hidden in the sentence under the bowl of noodle soup rather than these few mouthfuls of tasteless food.

Five days later, Gu Yun formally received the list of the Foreign Affairs Mission. After only glancing at it, he gave it to Shen Yi and said lightly, "See? We can only prepare to start."

Shen Yi had no choice but to follow his orders.

"Just in case, Ji Ping, I'd like to give you a few words — if something goes wrong, you'll be in charge of the army in my place. On the ground, you have the power to fight against those foreigners, but remember not to go into the water. You have too little experience in naval battles and will not be able to go against that old man."

Gu Yun spoke, and took out four letters he had written in advance in the Marshal tent, "If there is no mistake, send the first war report to the capital city. If fate doesn't favor us and we have an accident, then send the second one, and let the Grand Council cooperate with us to remedy it. Don't forget to attach an apology letter, sealed by the Black Tiger Emblem. All faults are for me to bear alone…

“The latter two are private letters. The third one is to be sent to Chang Geng first, so as to stabilize him. When things calm down, if you have the chance, give him the fourth one."

Shen Yi said angrily, "Are you leaving behind your wills to me?"

"This Marshal need to leave behind wills because of those western monkeys?" Gu Yun casually raised his eyebrows and said, "This is called being thorough. When the time comes, I would not have to write them again either. Military orders must be obeyed, stop talking nonsense, get to work!"

The next night, without warning, the Great Liang navy suddenly initiated an attack and invading the Western army. Both sides were almost familiar with each other, and were enraged as soon as they met head-on. Although the Western army was surprised, it still organized a counter-attack quickly. As soon as they started, they could feel that Great Liang's navy was particularly fierce this time around.

Master Ja directly put on his coat outside his nightgown. However, he couldn't figure out what made Gu Yun suddenly want to break the locked down front line situation. According to the information they got at the moment, Great Liang should not have such an opportunity.

This time, Gu Yun even skipped the routine scouting process. As if he didn't care about the enemy's storage and distribution, heavy artillery was mounted directly, and ‘sea cuttles’ went out like rain. The Western main ship caught several unexpected blows, and the newly repaired side sank again, becoming almost paralyzed.

The main Western ship was in chaos momentarily.

"Don't panic, don't panic!" Master Ja pulled a tong hou, "all standing by! Short Jiaos, immediately gather to stop them... Your Majesty! "

The pope walked slowly out, came to the deck and looked out from the *Qian Li Yan*.

"Calm down." He whispered.

The elderly leader seemed to possess a magical power that could soothe people's hearts. In one word, the crew and guards around him went quiet, awaiting his orders.

"The size of the other side's vanguard ships is about a little more than half of the normal size. Such a fierce advance is not Gu Yun's style," the pope whispered. "Why?"

Master Ja reluctantly pressed down his mind: "Great Liang people are too crazy. I don't think they are advancing, but more like making a last struggle."

"It's illogical," the pope shook his head as he asked the heralds to adjust the formation of the convoy.

Master Ja frowned and thought for a long time, and suddenly said: "That's right! I remember that Your Majesty received a message a few days ago that a foreign mission from the enemy camp was about to arrive at the front line. Would it have something to do with that?"

The pope: "You mean that there are cracks in the internal affairs of the Great Liang people. There are people who want to compromise to end the war?"

"There is evidence to support it," Master Ja said quickly. "You see, we have estimated the completion and opening time of Great Liang's train. Your Majesty also said at that time that when their whole line is completed, we will be very passive. Haven't we even designed several plans to destroy the line? However, according to our calculation, the railway line should have been built before the end of last year, or the trial operation may have already begun, but they have not made any movement so far, indicating that there is indeed an internal problem! "

The pope crossed his arms, a finger slightly rubbed his chin. At

this time, Gu Yun's vanguard had pierced the defense line of the Western warship like a sharp knife, came charging to the sea in a murderous manner.

The Western convoy encircled the main ship into a solid ball. The stored Eagle Armor flew out of the main ship and attacked down like rain.

"If it was me," Master Ja said to himself, "I would back up the main ship, quickly make a circle, lead their vanguard into it, and wipe out the enemy. They could not support such a heavy fire for a long time. Once they are cut off from behind, they would die here!"

The pope asked quietly, "Do you think Gu Yun will make such a low-level mistake?"

Master Ja: "..."

"Before you go to war, the most important thing you need to do is to understand your opponent — give my command: shrink the wings, focus on defense, move to the southeast, and call for reinforcements immediately." As the pope ordered in an organized way, he said to Master Ja, "If you have seriously studied Gu's cases of pacifying the rebellion in the East Sea and arresting the mountain bandits in the southwest, and carefully reflected on our several contacts with him in the north, you should have a rough understanding of Gu Yun.

“When his resources are really at a disadvantage, he will not let you see it; not only that, he would even seamlessly bring the complete Black Iron Camp in front of you, frighten you to death. The Great Liang people call this ‘false is true, true is false’."

Master Ja did not agree, but he did not dare to object, so he just followed the pope's words and said, "Yes, Your Majesty."

"Look, it's just a lure," the pope said with a smile. "Let us be patient, drag his hook a little further, and soon we'll really see the trump card in his hands."

At this time, the herald came to report: "Your Majesty, the first, second, and third fleets are not in port. They are going out on a

'mission at sea'. You see..."

‘Mission at sea’ was especially to escort and receive the Holy Land supply ships.

The pope replied without turning back, "They should have not gone far, transfer them back immediately. It's safe along the ‘high seas’. It doesn't need three fleets to escort those goods. It's necessary to have respect and sincerity when dealing with a dear old enemy."

"Yes!"

"Return! Close the wings!"

"Escort fleet adjust southeast direction, pay attention to speed—"

"Eagles! Retreat for the time being. Pull down all defense steel plates of the main ship, drain the water..."

The whole Western fleet quickly gathered together becoming a closely linked giant, the supply escort fleets that just left the port quickly returned, watching the fierce and fearless Great Liang Navy in front of it, forming a solid defense.

Every time, it was Gu Yun who walked the Westerners. This time, the situation suddenly changed. It became the Westerners that used heavy defense to stop the advance while Great Liang navy looks for a place to land their teeth.

Two minutes later, Great Liang's mad dog-like advance finally slowed down, apparently exhausted.

The pope: "Jacques, look."

With his voice, he saw a large number of reception and supply fleets coming down from three directions. At last, the trump card of Great Liang could no longer be hidden, its ferocious tusks were exposed in the night.

Master Ja was shocked — if he had just surrounded and eaten Great Liang's advance immediately as he said, the two sides of his side without the three fleets would be stretched and weakened by the

enemy, and would easily be pierced and torn by Great Liang's ambush!

"I told you," the pope gave him a slightly reprimanding look, "Only by knowing your enemy will you know where your true opportunity is — all fleets ready to fight back! While they still have not stood still, hit them in the head!"

As soon as he spoke, the artillery of the Westerners was pushed out like a tsunami, and the main forces of the third route of Great Liang suffered heavy losses as soon as they clashed with each other. Before they even had time to fight back, the most front-end sea Jiao warships had been sunk one after another.

At a glance, this effective supply almost seemed to have wiped out nearly a quarter of the living force of the main force of the Great Liang navy.

The Western water fleet was seething. From the day when Gu Yun took charge of Liangjiang, they had never had such a large chunk out of him!

However, Gu Yun himself was not so angry and anxious as one would imagine.

At this time, on a small to medium-sized sea Jiao in the Great Liang navy, Gu Yun just spent his spare time watching a large number of his ‘warships’ being sunk. Without blinking, he said to the guard on his side, "See, what did I say? Know yourself and know your enemy. That old man can prepare for more than ten years for a battle. He must have studied me very hard."

If it was daylight, the Westerners would find it easier to see the special features of the sunken ships.

The ships were all empty, their form resembled a different design of the ‘sea cuttle’.

This is the poor idea of the old-schooled bunch of Ling Shu Institute, gathering up the broken battleships in the front line, then imitate the power system of the cuttle, emptying the whole ship. This

kind of warship with only the shell was very light, it could slide far on the water automatically with little power. Although it's useless, it's a powerful tool to frighten people.

Gu Yun had sent part of the navy elsewhere; if he directly went on the battlefield, of course, it would be doubted by the foreigners, thus he simply used this method to feign.

"It would be better if they are delirious from this momentary victory," Gu Yun sat aside with his legs crossed. "Spread out and remember that our task today is to hold the enemy back."

The soldier licked his lips: "Marshal, can ‘the other side’ keep up?"

"That I dare not say, if it cannot then my fate is at its end," Gu Yun laughed low, "Pay attention to maneuver."

On the Western main ship, Master Ja was indeed overjoyed and lost his head. Unfortunately, there was a pope beside him. He didn't dare to forget himself too much.

And he soon found that this disadvantageous Great Liang navy was not so easy to deal with. After their horse lost their front foot, they had quickly made adjustments. Gu Yun's fighting style got the Westerners in a mess again, making the situation that was supposed to be a battle of annihilation to become a match of equal strength.

The main forces of the two armies were entangled from midnight until the next morning——

When the first ray of sunlight pierced the sea, the battlefield of chaos fighting all night in the dark was suddenly exposed to the sun.

On the main ship of Great Liang, the soldiers said: "Marshal, there is no news on the other side. Let's withdraw. If we go on like this, the position of the main ship will be exposed. We don't have the big iron monsters that can't be sunk no matter how it was bombed. You can't risk yourself like this!"

Gu Yun reached out his hand and stroked the frame of his liuli glass: "Don't be impatient."

At this time, the pope suddenly put his Qian Li Yan into Master Ja's hands: "The ship with the Wu Yue sign! That must be the enemy's main ship. Gu Yun must be on it. Take it down!"

With the pope's order, the heavy artillery moved, Gu Yun's main ship was unable to avoid it.

Private: "Marshal!"

At the critical moment, four to five small ships rushed out without Gu Yun's order, using themselves to guard in front of the main ship; an explosion instantly sounded.

Gu Yun's side face suddenly tightened. At this time, a sailor stumbled in and said, "Marshal, we cannot hold on anymore!"

Gu Yun narrowed his eyes slightly.

"Marshal!"

"It's alright, don't panic. The back team changes to the front, hold them for a while," Gu Yun whispers, "From... "

He didn't finish his words; suddenly, there was an Eagle sound in the air. It was so sharp that it was like an alarm post. Even Gu Yun, a half-deaf, could hear it.

Gu Yun looked back.

That was the code from Shen Yi, who was in charge as the chief dispatcher on the shore — the other side had succeeded!

The soldier froze for a moment, then jumped up: "Our Eagles!"

Gu Yun: "Give me a *Qian Li Yan*."

The soldier licked his chapped lips: "Marshal, we..."

"Be careful!"

Boom!——

At this time, a stray bullet was passing through the gap of the guarding ships, hitting the tail of Great Liang’s main ship. The whole sea Jiao warship trembled greatly, smoke and sparks arose from all directions.

In the chaos, a piece of a liuli glass flew away, broken.

On the 24th day of January, Li Feng was awakened by the urgent battle report in the middle of the night before the Foreign Affairs Mission could arrive at the front line.

Signed with the Black Tiger emblem — the frontline achieved great victory!

Gu Yun's arrangement in the past half-year had begun to take shape. No one knew when he had sent his men to the south, secretly instigated a group of islands in Nanyang occupied by the Westerner troops and ambushed a large part of troops in the southwest border.

On the night of January 21st, a part of the main forces of Great Liang’s navy raided the enemy directly on the battlefield, using the cautious nature of the enemy's general to contain the enemy's forces. At the same time, the warship group which was lying in ambush on the southwest border, both sides in and out cooperate and swept over the islands at Nanyang, annihilated the forces of the foreigners occupied here, then immediately sent troops to intercept the supply line of the enemy, choking the enemy's neck!

Who said that Great Liang's navy could not fight on the open sea?

The war report was very concise, stating only the results, not much for the details and casualties.

After this battle, the Western troops retreated to the sea area of Dongying in a panic. The local militia took the opportunity to attack

the enemy on the ground. The southern half of the country exploded in all directions; it was the first dawn on the frontline after a long gloomy period.

Li Feng almost jumped up, getting dressed in the middle of the night wanting to summon a grand court meeting.

Foreign Affairs Mission bullshit, if they could beat the foreigners back to their home, they would not allow them to take even a grain of sand.

The servants were running around in a circle around him. After Zhu Little Feet's death, the position of serving beside Li Feng had changed several people, but none were to his liking. At this time, it was also an old man who was serving him. He was not talkative and could be seen as smart: "Congratulations, Your Majesty, with Marshal Gu, the day we recover Jiangnan is upon us!"

Li Feng laughed aloud, his speech was almost incoherent, "I no longer have to worry about explaining to my ancestors in the afterlife, truly."

Li Feng, who had been limping for a long time, almost ran out as if there was wind at his feet. Walking halfway, being blown by the night wind, Emperor Long An's feverish brain finally cooled down, and the happy look on his face dimmed.

Yes, this battle has been won. Then what's next?

Many of the decrees carried out by the Grand Council were under the banner of ‘prioritize the war’. In addition to bringing out their Red Imperial Edict and Iron Plaque and their old age to lecture him, every noble family only wanted to stop the war.

If Li Feng was hesitant about war and peace before, then Gu Yun's victory had added a lot of chips to one side of the scale, making the balance in his heart turn to one side.

"*The guts of these aristocratic families are getting bigger and bigger, even wanted to intervene such a big war*," the emperor thought quietly, "*What are they scheming*?"

Li Feng's steps were halted, and he said to the servant absent-mindedly: "My nanny Zhao has not been in the palace for several years, do you remember her?"

The servant did not know much, so he bowed his head and answered: "I heard that Madame Zhao now has only one daughter, which is still on duty in the palace. She has accepted Third Master Fang as her adopted son. A few days ago, she frequently presents her plaque, she must have come to beg for help."

Li Feng said "*Oh*" and half-lowered his eyes: "Nobles who broke the law and committed crime are the same with the common people. In those days, *Wei Wang* was still imprisoned like anyone else, no one had come out to demand his justice. On the other hand, how come the sons of these families are all so precious?"

The servant heard the light killing intent in it. He looked at Li Feng carefully and didn't dare to speak for a moment.

Li Feng's hot sweat on his forehead was blown down by the cold wind. He covered his chest and coughed a few times. The servant quickly draped a fur coat on him.

At the age of seven, the crown prince was fairly smart, but he was too meek and weak, not quite resembling himself. Instead, he was more like the former emperor Yuan He. And what were the circumstances of Yuan He's ruling?

Li Feng could still remember —— the former emperor always felt that his position was unjust, having to rely on this and that, not having even military authority in his hands. Even though the Gu family had only one young child, he still allowed the deadly Black Iron Tiger Emblem to be passed down. Always asking others for opinions even for the most insignificant matters, always bringing up affection to coerce, raising a bunch of national vermin, almost ruining the rich possessions left by Emperor Wu.

It took Li Feng ten years, yet he had still not finished cleaning up the mess left by the former emperor.

Li Feng felt more and more helpless in the past two years. He did

not want his son to fall into the same predicament of his father.

But in this situation, who should he believe?

Yan Wang?

Yan Wang's 'will not marry', 'will not have children' and 'willing to die for the country' were all his own words, there were plenty of easy to hear, beautiful words in the world. When the evidence of those disorderly subjects and traitors were indisputable, they were still crying and saying that they were all struggling for the country and the people. Although Li Feng could be moved by him for a while, but after a long time, he would sober up.

Li Feng was protecting Chang Geng at present because he also saw the value of this reform. *Yan Wang* was right in saying that the system and rules were the most important. No matter what *Yan Wang* wanted to change into, this scarred nation was indeed developing in a better direction.

Li Feng hoped to use *Yan Wang*'s hands to completely clean up the previous dynasty's terminal illness and leave a clear and bright life for the crown prince in the future.

At the same time, however, he could never give his weak son to the hands of his younger brother who had the resolve to kill. If one day he was going to follow the former emperor, the first person he needed to deal with was *Yan Wang,* and the second was Gu Yun.

(T/N: respect point -1000)

"No, go back to the palace. Call for the court tomorrow morning. When the day breaks, ask the prince to come over." Li Feng suddenly gave orders.

The internal servant was in confusion. They were talking about nanny Zhao's affairs, how come the emperor, after a moment of silence, had moved on to the prince?

"And," Li Feng said again, "What about the memorial I brought back? Bring it to me. "

The memorial was written by Xu Ling. His idea of reforming the constitution of school was not very fluent, even a bit inexperienced, but it didn't matter, they can leave it to the Grand Council to coordinate and improve it. The court was making a fuss about killing and beheading people and severely punishing the imperial examination fraud. Only a few scholars could think of the future.

If he could, Li Feng, like any ordinary father, would like to give his young son more years of shelter and let him play with grass crickets in the harem. But who knew what would happen soon in this era?

The next morning, the news of the great victory on the front lines of Liangjiang came straight down, all forces have not yet had time to respond to this sudden result, but for the first time, Li Feng took a clear stand and forcefully implemented two new policies at the great court meeting:

First, he agreed with the 'Long An New Policy' of the Grand Council on abolishing the *Feng Huo* tickets and changing the currency policy.

Second, on the court, he agreed with Xu Ling and the two courts' requests for the reform of the constitution of the Imperial Academy, in which the imperfect parts would be led by the Grand Council, with the cooperation of the Imperial Academy, the Ministry of Rites, and the two courts to revise.

At the same time, Li Feng dragged Jiang Chong and the Ling Shu Institute out together on the court for a scolding, demanded them to speed up the investigation of fraud cases in the nine provinces at once. All the people involved, regardless of their origins, would be punished severely. He also ordered Ling Shu Institute to think of a way to expand the steam rail line from the capital to Jiangnan. They must not give the Westerners a room to breathe and waste this victory. They must continue this vigorous momentum and attain more victory.

Before the court was dismissed, Li Feng announced his final decision: the 11-year-old prince was about to attend the court.

Chapter 124: Finale (Part I)

T/N: Finale has 3 parts.
P.S. Happy birthday yifu ^^ (16th day of first lunar month = Feb 9, 2020)

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With such favorable time and place, do you not remember what happened twenty years ago?

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This was the first time that Emperor Long An, who always had an ambiguous attitude, expressed his stand clearly at the great court meeting. He didn't disclose half a word with anyone in advance. Not only the Fang Qin Party, but the Grand Council's members were also in confusion.

Jiang Chong glanced at *Yan Wang* vaguely and said to himself, "*Did the emperor take the wrong medicine?*"

Chang Geng's face did not show any difference. He stepped forward and plainly flattered him. Although he played politics, he was naturally born with a kind of immortal spirit of someone living in a remote forest. Even the posture of flattering seemed to be very indifferent, not taking winning or losing to heart, as if he had completely agreed with Li Feng in advance.

At that time, someone's face changed.

Li Feng knew in his heart that *Yan Wang* intended to borrow his influence, the civil and martial of the court all have their own plans, but it didn't matter, if he could build a ladder for Yan Wang, he could build a ladder for anyone.

This time, Li Feng used two political orders to push the Grand Council to the top of the storm. He wanted to see what those people who always brought up the Red Imperial Edict and Iron Plaque could do to *Yan Wang,* who had become a monk and only called ‘Royal Father’ once in all his life.

This day, the capital was doomed to a sleepless night.

In the Grand Council, Jiang Chong whispered to Chang Geng, "Your Highness, what should we do? Do we continue according to the original plan?"

Chang Geng said without hesitation, "Strike while the iron is hot."

Jiang Chong took a deep look at Chang Geng and asked, "Your Highness, if we were too forceful, what if they use their last resort?"

Chang Geng turned to look at him and said meaningfully, "What I'm afraid of is that they don't do it. Brother Han Shi, do you know what the most useful sentence I've learned in my life is?"

Jiang Chong suddenly felt incredibly frightened.

Chang Geng said, "On the battlefield, whoever doesn't want to die, will die first."

On his way home from the Grand Council, Chang Geng happened to run into Fang Qin's carriage. He told Huo Dan, "Let Master Fang go first."

After a while, Huo Dan ran back to report: "Your Highness, Lord Fang said he didn't dare to be impolite. He has already made way."

Chang Geng brushed aside the curtain and bowed to Fang Qin politely. They passed each other peacefully, as if they didn't want the other to perish.

Chang Geng leaned on the carriage and thought that if he and Fang Qin were to change places, he would endure this storm. When the new nobles in the imperial court occupied the transportation finance, then pushed it when their foundation was not stable and their expansion was too fast, at that time, he would simply wait silently for Li Feng to act —— the nobles like cobwebs in the

imperial court have forces everywhere. If they were willing to pursue it slowly, there would be opportunities to restore the old system after the war.

Chang Geng also knew that with Fang Qin's nature, he must have also thought the same.

That was why even if he dragged everyone to walk on this string, he must not let him calmly wait for this opportunity.

Fang Qin watched until Yan Wang's carriage was already far away, then ordered his family servant to continue moving. The twilight around him slowly slipped into the long night. He seemed to see the general trend of the thread, running like flowing water in front of him, and he was helpless to stop it. The ten thousand mile-long dike he stepped on was made of sand and dust. It seemed to be mighty and magnificent, but in fact, it was of no use, the boundless world was countering to him.

Back at Fang's residence, as usual, there were already guests waiting for him. Grand Scholar Fang was no longer interested in cultivating towards immortality and seeking Tao. He was entertaining the guests in the front hall in person. As soon as Fang Qin entered, all the people present stood up and looked at him with various expressions.

Fang Qin also had an ominous premonition in his heart: "Father, what's the matter?"

Grand Scholar Fang's face sank like water and said, "Your yimei* was convicted of offending the queen today. She was just grounded and forbidden visits from relatives."

*义妹, *adoptive younger sister*

Madame Fang had a good relationship with the emperor's Nanny Zhao. She jokingly asked Fang Qin's third younger brother to accept Madame Zhao as his adoptive mother. There was nothing involving Fang Qin here, but to show intimacy as a courtesy, he also called Madame Zhao's daughter on duty in the palace ‘yimei’ in front of outsiders.

Fang Qin said in surprise: "Why?"

"Why? There is no need for any reason," Grand Scholar Fang said slowly."Remember that year, His Majesty also called Gu Yun 'uncle', having deep affection since young, but still sent him to prison simply from one word of disagreement. Let alone those of us —— the present emperor is cruel and ungrateful, truly makes people bitterly disappointed."

Fang Qin turned his head and told his family servant, "Send a letter to Imperial Duke Zhao at once, tell him to stop playing such a childish trick, he should know better."

As soon as he said this, everyone was in an uproar in the hall. Suddenly someone stood up and objected: "Master Fang, why are you extending your arm outside again?"

Fang Qin ignored the others, only stared at Grand Scholar Fang and said: "Father, can't you see? His Majesty is not the former emperor, everything could only go with his will. If you let him feel that he is being persecuted, he will inevitably rebound. We are only going to eradicate the *Yan Wang* Party. What's the use of picking a fight with the emperor?"

Without waiting for Grand Scholar Fang to speak, Fang Qin said sharply: "I also want to protect my third brother, but if you want to go on like this, the ones involved will not only be third brother. All of you here are all from our side, let me say a few unpleasant words: do you really think Imperial Duke Zhao had wiped his own bottom clean? If *Yan Wang* catches his weak point and makes use of it, then we will be even more passive!

It's just a railway line, he did not allow it to be built, besides adding a little hindrance to Li Min, is there any real use? Gu Yun still mobilized the troops as usual, while your Foreign Affairs Mission can't even get to the front line! What else can you do now? Will you simply cut off supplies to the frontline and sell the country?"

He was already irritated for a long time, letting it all out in these words, not even saving face for his father. The surrounding was quiet for a moment, one of them spoke up, "Then Master Fang intends to

endure it?"

Fang Qin: "..."

He found that he could hardly communicate with these people, especially after Grand Scholar Fang came out of retirement again.

When fate was at its end, it's not because of the rapid development of the outside world that everything will be exhausted. In a big country with countless noble families, if each family could have one person who could serve as a pillar — didn't have to be many, and did not necessarily be exceptionally talented, or a master of literary and martial arts, as long as their brain was clear, self-conscious, and knew what to do and what not to do — then with the accumulation of generations, the *Yan Wang* Party, even with extraordinary abilities, would not be able to climb to their heads.

Fang Qin looked around and sneered. Having nothing else he could say, he left.

Grand Scholar Fang sat up with his eyes lowered, reached out his hand and stroked his beard. "My son is incompetent, how embarrassing."

Next to him, an official no longer able to lift his eyelids from old age said in a low voice: "Second Master is brilliant, but he is still too young and vigorous in the end."

At Fang Qin's age, he could hardly be called ‘young and vigorous’. However, Grand Scholar Fang shook his head meaningfully: "It's true, when Emperor Wu was in power, he was still young, had not gone through these things, and had less experience. I feel that it is not a bad thing to conceal some things from the younger generations, avoid making them worry too much.

The old brothers who pushed the former emperor to the throne are still here, go back and gather your children and grandchildren. Maybe we will still be able to carry this out… But my unfilial son is also right. Tell Imperial Duke Zhao to restrain his recent childish endeavor. If he cannot kill in one move, then why waste the effort? He would only get laughed at."

However, Yan Wang did not give Imperial Duke Zhao the chance to restrain.

The next day, the Ling Shu Institute announced that the steam train had passed various rigorous testing and everything was ready. They sincerely asked Emperor Long An to come see it with his own eyes. Li Feng happily took the crown prince with him and rode the train for a while in person. However, before returning to the palace and waiting for the fresh excitement to pass, he received the letter urging for the railway completion from Yao Zhen, which successfully piled up the anxiety in the heart of Emperor Long An.

Piling up until the evening, when the Imperial Censorate brought the last grass to ignite the emperor's anger.

The Imperial Censorate accused that Imperial Duke Zhao was unjust, conniving his family members to embezzle and plunder the lands from farmers at a low price.

The Canal Office and Ling Shu Institute, jointly in charge of the steam rail line, immediately followed along with a large number of people who deliberately contributed to the situation, and quickly pushed the case to the point of explosion.

The forces *Yan Wang* had built up through all these years exposed a corner of the iceberg, the road for career ascension that had been blocked since the later years of Emperor Wu's rule was unclogged by him.

The reports of illegal land occupation in various places have been revealed in succession in a premeditated way, and finally implicated the problem of illegal land occupation going on in Great Liang for a long time.

At once, several bystanders watching the fun came out and asked for the whole country to be investigated —

Of course, this absurd proposal was rejected by Li Feng. Even if Li Feng wanted to display his authority to the noble families, he must untangle it one by one with each step, he could not have such a big appetite at one time.

However, Imperial Duke Zhao, the early bird, was unable to run away. He was arrested in a few days. Later implicated a large number of his family members and disciples who were riding on his coat tail. At his arrest, the onlookers even climbed up the wall to see inside. The storytellers at the Wang Nan Tower compiled a new book in two days, which was very popular.

In his first time listening to politics, the crown prince was met with such a big case. The little boy had earned a lot more knowledge. He was stunned and watched on with wide eyes, his mind had also opened a lot more.

When the court was about to be dismissed, *Yan Wang,* who had not been very vocal, suddenly asked, "What does Your Highness think?"

The little crown prince was well protected by Li Feng, he was innocent and did not have a calculating mind. He once ‘consulted’ his fourth uncle under Li Feng's order. When he heard Chang Geng's question, he blurted out without hesitation what he had been taught by others: "Han Fei* has said, 'a ruler with no skills will be fooled by their subjects, subjects bound by no rules will run rampant.' The stability of the country depends on the law. For people, there are four kinds: virtuous, foolish, loyal and traitorous. For matters, there are right and wrong. If the law system is unclear, it will make the party and the masses run rampant, the villains run rampant, then...the person in charge will not be able to control anymore."

**a philosopher*

His voice was still childish, he was like a schoolboy who was picked in class to answer his teacher's questions. He looked at Chang Geng with eyes filled with great expectations.

Chang Geng only smiled but didn't speak. Li Feng scolded him with a straight face: "Only repeating what was in the book, what is there to be proud of. Go back and work hard. Don't slack off."

The crown prince did not dare to say anything, he had to answer with his head down, but his childish words had a different meaning in the ears of the others.

For those who used themselves to measure others, even if they saw a young child, they would still feel that the boy was as full of schemes, with every word laced with deep meaning such as themselves.

That night, the 11-year-old crown prince's words spread out of the forbidden palace like wildfire. Concealing this matter from Fang Qin, Scholar Fang gathered together all the old jackals who had once helped the former emperor, splitting every little bit of the crown prince's saliva to analyze, and understood Li Feng's meaning.

"It's been three generations," Grand Scholar Fang sneered, "It's hard to reach the grace of heaven. The gentlemen must have seen, the emperor let the crown prince listen to politics, he was determined to claim the lives of us old men."

Another person said: "If it wasn't for Wang Guo causing trouble, our plan would have gone properly, *Yan Wang* should have had his title stripped by mixing up the royal blood and be sent to a remote place by now. This bastard child who came out of nowhere dares to ride on our heads. Brother Fang, if we are not decisive, we will suffer."

Grand Scholar Fang's tensed features turned sharp. He looked around slowly and said in a low voice, "Would you mind writing the words in your heart into your palm."

Many years ago, this group of ambitious conspirators once came together, showing their hands, the name of the former emperor Yuan He was written on them. At this time, they were already on their last legs, some were old and some were dead. They reunited once more to show their old hands——

"Clean up the emperor’s side*."

"Clean up the emperor’s side."

"Clean up the emperor’s side, the First Prince no longer has a mother."

...

**the characters written on their hands were 清君侧 - Qing Jun Ce, meaning to rid the ruler's side of traitorous subjects*

"That year, when Su Wang* pretended to be ill on his way, it was thanks to you all who learned about it in advance that he wanted to go to the capital secretly and asked the First Princess for an order, capturing him in the name of 'rebelling' and pushed the former emperor to the throne." Grand Scholar Fang said in a low voice, "Now you have seen this situation in the capital. How to start first and who can be of use, you gentlemen came here today, I'm sure you all have your plans."

**Yuan He's brother, his competition to the throne back then*

Grand Scholar Fang was not hot-headed. He knew that it was impossible to move the Northern Camp without the Gu family members on their side this time. Since Liu Chong Shan's rebellion last time, the establishment of the imperial army also underwent major adjustments. For positions above Company Commander, it must be strictly checked to confirm that their families were innocent and their military achievements were real. It put an end to some people's loopholes. At the same time, it was divided into two parts of two-way management. They would restrain each other but do not interfere with each other. It was also necessary to strictly prevent someone in the imperial army from covering the sky and breaking the law.

However, there were advantages and disadvantages to everything. The noble families of Great Liang were divided into civil and military, there were also generals that belong to the nobility, however, most of these families have declined. Otherwise, there would not be such a scene of not having anyone of use in Yuan He years, having no choice but to let Gu Yun, a young child, to take control of the army.

The descendants of these renowned generals, born under the great shade of their ancestors, if they were incompetent in both literary and martial arts, they would enter the imperial army through the back door like Liu Chong Shan, spending years accumulating service time, then find a way to forge military merits to raise up through the ranks.

After years of co-existing, there had been a special ecology between these young soldiers and real soldiers. Both sides save face for each other, which could not only ensure combat effectiveness but also give consideration to relationship and dignity.

Unfortunately, this balance was destroyed by Li Feng after the mutiny of the imperial army.

The person in charge may think that a law they established in anger was thorough and clear. At that time, no one reminded Li Feng, who was delirious from fury, that he had blocked all the young men's dream of promotion in the capital.

Which young master was not spoiled? Who would be willing to be a small soldier for all his life?

It's not terrible to offend the young master. What's important was that in the early years of the Great Liang Dynasty, military officers were more important than civil ones. The ancestors left behind one privilege — military generals were allowed to have their own family soldiers, keep some of their arms, and shelter the later generations. When in danger, they could be the last fighting force of the country. When Liu Chong Shan, Lu Chang, and others rebelled, Fang Qin had used these forces to restrain the rebels and hold them back until the Northern Camp arrived.

Grand Scholar Fang looked around and said, "Gu Yun has increased his troops to the southwest, and is also fighting in the East Sea. He does not have many troops to mobilize, at present, all his people are guarding the four regions. The Northern Camp is not allowed to enter unless called. Li Min is a man who is fishing for fame, he does not like having too many people at his side, only taking an old man or two with him wherever he goes. I heard that he has good skills in riding and archery, but he had only flailed around on the city tower several times, perhaps he would not be able to crush many nails. It's not hard to get rid of him — I just don't know whether you gentlemen want to carry it out 'in the dark' or 'in the open'."

Nearby, someone asked, "Dare to ask Master Fang, what is 'in the dark' and what is 'in the open'?"

The scholar who trained more than half of the talented officials in the court said with his face unchanged: "If you want to be in the dark, just ask twenty or thirty of suicide soldiers to ambush on the night Li Min is on his way back from the court, stop and kill him, and erase all evidence, letting it passed by, the emperor will not be able to do anything either... If you want to be in the open, then let the emperor know who is the good general and loyal officials, who are the ones responsible for his country, how the disorderly subjects and thieves are taken down —— and who can bear the responsibility of the crown prince."

"This... Master Fang, I'm afraid it won't be easy. " It was the son of the Marquis of Peace, one of the three Marquises in the capital in the old days. The old Marquis had already passed away, this person had a body full of fat and had a hard time walking. He did not go out too many times a year. His appearance was far different from the descendants of a famous general, but his mind was unexpectedly clear. At this time, he said, "Without discussing how to avoid the imperial army and the imperial guards when carrying it out, let's say we succeed, with the emperor's character of rather breaking than leaving things whole, will he not investigate it to the end? The hard-headed ones in Northern Camp are all dead, now they are all obedient, and will not enter without being summoned. What if in the fit of anger, the emperor really summons them? They are far away, then what about the guards inside the palace and the imperial army outside the palace? The aftereffect of Liu Chong Shan and Lu Chang's rebellion has not passed yet, I'm afraid it's not so easy. "

"It isn't like there are no places in the palace that do not have imperial guards, and there are places the imperial army can not enter. This year, there is good news on the front lines of Jiangnan in the East Sea. The flatterers of the Ministry of Rites will take this opportunity to propose hosting a large party, to boost morale and to pray for the country, there will be many chances," Grand Scholar Fang replied lightly, "As for the emperor's anger afterward..."

When he said this, his voice stopped. He laughed low and raised his narrow and slightly drooping eyelids: "Then we have to make him 'unable to get angry'. What, do you think that if Li Min no longer exists, the emperor will let us go easily? You have heard what the

crown prince said today in the morning. As a little child, what does the crown prince know about national affairs? Who taught him those words? He is only eleven years old, but whenever he opens his mouth it is always 'no emotions involved in laws' and 'eliminate party and factions'. Scolding in the middle of the court, he might as well pointed to our noses and said that we are all villains. Being indecisive at this moment, do you want to wait for the crown prince to ascend the throne and give us three meters of white silk*?"

白绫, *white silk, often used in ancient times when the Emperor bestow on the guilty minister to commit suicide.*

His statement was not at all ambiguous, it's outrageous and immoral.

Grand Scholar Fang was worthy of being an old minister who had entrusted Emperor Yuan He to the throne. He was bold, his guts was large, wanting to go big as soon as he makes a move, speaking straightforwardly, "If the Emperor acts out of place, then get rid of the Emperor, if the crown prince does not obey, then use his elder brother who had lost his mother as a puppet."

The Marquis of Peace was stunned for a long time, then stuttered to ask another fatal question: "Then...would Gu Yun let this slide?"

"The Foreign Affairs Mission is still on its way, and it has been arranged," said Grand Scholar Fang with a low smile. "The front line, the preying enemy, the envoy, why, with such favorable time and place, do you not remember what happened twenty years ago?"

A storm was brewing in the center, but *Yan Wang,* the one at the center of it all still seemed to be unaware, still arrived on time every day, sparing no effort to promote his new policy.

He even happily received a letter from Gu Yun.

Gu Yun sent the letter directly to his home. It was entirely a private letter. When Huo Dan handed it to him, Chang Geng’s eyes suddenly lit up, making Commander Huo blush as red as a tomato.

"Does he have extraordinary abilities?" As Chang Geng lifted up the envelope and aimed it at the light, he carefully observed the contents of the envelope, while half-truthfully and half-falsely complained to Huo Dan, "While dealing with foreigners, he still has this kind of leisurely hobby, what am I supposed to say to him."

There had never been a ‘mistress' in the traditional sense in the Marquis’s manor. Uncle Huo, as the bodyguard serving by their side, had also known something vaguely. However, it was still difficult for him to adapt to this situation, especially unable to discuss the family letter from Marshal with the ‘other master’. Listening to *Yan Wang*’s words, he felt that his role had changed from the commander of the family guard to a nanny eager for gossip; he had to stand aside with great shame and act as a house post blushing red.

Since the war began, this was the first time Gu Yun had sent such a thick home letter to Chang Geng. For a while, he was reluctant to tear it open. He took the envelope in his hands to caress and rub repeatedly, even bringing it to the tip of his nose to take a whiff, as if he could smell the scent of the man far away, his expression dazed and entranced.

The blood on Huo Dan's face soon seeped out of his pores, he stammered: "Your...Your Highness, you...What are you doing?"

Chang Geng glanced at him, as if he thought Huo Dan's red face was particularly interesting, He deliberately teased him and said, "I dreamt of my yifu yesterday, waking up in the middle of the night and couldn't sleep again, finally knew what was called ‘tossing and turning restlessly’. Turns out, I received his letter today. Such a coincidence, wouldn't you say?"

Huo Dan: "..."

The two words ‘my yifu’ made him shiver. Huo Dan thought bitterly, "*What is the little Marquis doing? Why is he becoming more and more outrageous! This will cause the old marquis and the princess in the afterlife to come back to life from anger."*

Chang Geng secretly smiled and was about to open the envelope with a knife. Suddenly, a Lin Yuan wooden bird came in. That day,

when Liu Zhong came asking to join them, Chang Geng did not trust him entirely. He had sent two Lin Yuan Pavilion people, one in the open, the other in the dark, following him to Liangjiang. The person in the open pretended to be a Liu family's servant boy and contacted Liu Zhong with the capital city. The one in the dark was an expert. He followed the envoys to explore all kinds of changes and sent letters to the capital city at any time.

Chang Geng hurriedly stored Gu Yun's private letter into his arms and took a look at the wooden bird first.

A moment later, he gave a sneer —— some people were still very thoughtful.

Chapter 125: Finale (Part II)

Important note: For the purpose of this translation:
Imperial guards = those that guard the palace;
Imperial army = those that guard the emperor

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If it wasn't for the commander's grave injury, it would have been a perfect victory to be written in history books.

—

Jiangbei.

Before the wooden bird could fly into the commander's tent, it was caught by a guard. He held the little thing in his hands, turning it over and over several times, but was not able to figure it out. Just as he had seen it as a threat and wanted to take it to the army's Ling Shu, someone said in a low voice: "Give it to me."

The guard looked up and saw Shen Yi coming in from the outside. He quickly handed over the wooden bird.

Shen Yi received it and touched the wooden bird's smooth head. He felt as if he had just heard General Shen sighing.

The wooden bird was attracted by the magnet left by General Zhong Chan. Shen Yi held it lightly and walked into the tent. Inside, the light was dim. Several military doctors came in and out quietly. The smell of medicine was suffocating, combined with the scent of fresh blood that was unable to wash off.

Yao Zhen was standing on one side, turning his head to Shen Yi, his expression grim.

In the naval battle that day, in order to delay time, Gu Yun's main ship was hit by the enemy. The ship disintegrated on the spot, the gold box exploded on the water surface. Fortunately, although Gu Yun was deaf and blind, his reaction was still quick. Feeling that

something was not right, he ordered people to abandon the ship and jumped into the sea.

Because he jumped in time, when an Eagle fished him out of the water, for better or worse, he was not yet completely baked.

The supply line of the Western army was cut off, and the upper reaches of the Neijiang River was controlled by Gu Yun's increased troops in the southwest. With two of their supply lines all cut off, they had to retreat from the Dongying Sea.

If it wasn't for the commander's grave injury, it would have been a perfect victory to be written in history books.

Gu Yun prepared the war report, home letters, and other props properly in advance, keeping his injuries hidden from outsiders and the insiders altogether. Even within the Liangjiang camp, the news was also blocked; except for several high ranking generals, private guards, military doctors, and several Eagles who brought him back, no one was aware of it.

One could imagine how much pressure Shen Yi and Yao Zhen bear this time.

Shen Yi: "How is it?"

"You came just in time. He's awake," Yao Zhen whispered. "Marshal Gu had made a great prediction bringing you here. Brother Ji Ping, if you weren't here, I think the sky would collapse."

Shen Yi said with a wry smile: "It's nothing, we will get used to it… You go rest first, I'll have a word with him."

Yao Zhen nodded, taking leave with the doctors. Shen Yi walked over lightly, holding Gu Yun's hands hanging limply over the bed.

As soon as the bed's curtain was down, Gu Yun could not feel people going in and out of the tent at all. Until now, only when he could sense the callous caused by handling the Wind Slasher did he realize it was Shen Yi who came.

Gu Yun's body did not have many places unscathed. He was

covered with steel plates. The whole body was fixed in place, he could not even turn his head. Sometimes unconscious and sometimes awake from pain, as soon as he opened his eyes, cold sweat on his forehead began to flow down. Even if he opened them, they could not find focus. The military doctor said that people could easily hurt their ears and eyes in a huge explosion. Now, he could only feel a hint of light when opening his eyes, not to mention liuli glass, even the Qian Li Yan would not be of use.

"Don't know if it could still get better." Gu Yun thought in silence, "Will I truly be blind in the future?"

As soon as Shen Yi saw his blank eyes, his nose stung. On Gu Yun's palm, he wrote, "*There is a letter from Lin Yuan Pavilion*."

Gu Yun blinked.

Shen Yi took apart the wooden bird and prepared to write to him. However, when he glanced at the contents of the note, his face first tightened.

Gu Yun waited for a long time, but he didn't say a word. His fingers questioningly tapped on the back of Shen Yi's hand.

Shen Yi was a good-natured person. In addition to shouting half-truthfully and half-falsely when fighting with Gu Yun, he seldom got angry. At this time, he sat on the edge of the bed, holding the wooden bird's hand and suddenly trembled. His chest fluctuated violently several times, then there was a crack —— the wooden bird's head was broken off by him.

"*What is this?"* He thought to himself, "*What is this! For whom do we die, and for whom do we devote ourselves? Does any of it mean any goddamn thing?"*

Gu Yun was tense; fearing that there would be new problems arising, he stopped worry about his blind eyes, trying to open his mouth and said: "What...*cough*... "

There was a wound on his throat caused by a bullet shell, it overlapped with an old scar, almost injuring the artery. Although he

did not become another Liao Ran, it was very difficult to speak, sounding like a broken pipe.

"The court is still insisting on a truce?" the broken pipe asked.

Shen Yi's eyes were full of bloodshot. In Gu Yun's hand, he wrote: "Lin Yuan Pavilion sent a special person to monitor the Foreign Affairs Mission, and found that some of them were secretly communicating with Western envoys. A group of people with unknown identities were mixing in with the Foreign Affairs Mission."

Gu Yun breathed a sigh of relief and moved his fixed neck. "I thought it was something important...Isn't the list of the Foreign Affairs Mission already delivered? There's no reason to add more people suddenly. If it is true, stop them outside the camp. It doesn't matter."

Shen Yi: "*Because of this battle, there was no reason for the Foreign Affairs Mission to come to the front line anymore. They were on standby in Pengcheng and awaited the imperial court for advice. Li Feng said that it was fine for them to go back without success, so he ordered them to have a rest in Pengcheng for a while. When the imperial court allocated the reward materials, they would be sent to the front line of Liangjiang together to—"*

Gu Yun slightly raises one long eyebrow, Shen Yi pauses with difficulty, then wrote on his palm: "*Reward the army*."

These two words were too sensitive for all the old subordinates of Black Iron Camp. Gu Yun obviously twitched, but his body was forcibly bound back to its original position by the steel plates, cold sweat flowed down his temples.

Shen Yi hurriedly held him down: "Zi Xi!"

With this action, blood started to soak through Gu Yun's bandage on his chest, the smell of blood overpowered the medicinal scent, making his face even paler.

Shen Yi had the illusion that Gu Yun's whole body was slowly evaporating.

Yet he refused to pass out.

He had to muster up the illusion that he still had plenty of strength to spare for both insiders and outsiders to see.

A man casting aside life and death — both when he was still alive and in the afterlife — wasting his efforts, to exchange for what in return?

Even if there was a long history of fame, there would only be a memorial tablet left in the future.

When the future nobles remember him, they would arrange one or two idle allusions, or deliberately criticize him to show that they were more knowledgeable and different than others.

When the common people remember him, they most likely would fabricate a romance story a hundred and eighty times over, arrange him with an unknown woman in the midst of his hurried life, and they would elope together, all blessings could only be enjoyed after death.

Shen Yi: "I'll write to Miss Chen right away. I...I... I'll accompany you to resign from our positions and go home. You can abduct His Highness together. You can heal your wounds, cure your diseases, whatever you want… Forget about the Li family or Zhang family bullshit! I... "

Gu Yun sighed and held his hand gently.

Shen Yi's breath was so disordered that he couldn’t speak. He made an expression of being ready to wail and cry in an angle that Gu Yun couldn’t see, but he didn’t dare to tremble and sob too much for fear that Gu Yun would be aware of it. He didn’t dare to cry out, breathing in silently through his mouth. His tears were caught by his own steel armor.

Gu Yun could still sense it, but he didn't expose him. He clapped his hand and said softly: "It's not a big deal, no need to explode. Do you have any news from Chang Geng?"

"*Yes*." Shen Yi wrote, "*His Highness said, let you not worry about*

anything else. If any villain intends to make a mess, just kill them. Even if the sky collapses in the capital, he can shoulder it."

Gu Yun smiled weakly.

Blood loss would make people's minds unclear. It took him several times more energy and an all-out effort to concentrate on what was going on: "What can I say... Before the war is over, someone already wants to get rid of me first. It's true that the capital is changing. Some people are using their last resort. There's bound to be another battle between us and the foreigners. At present, I can't walk... and can not help him very much. You can let the Foreign Affairs Mission in, then immediately stop them, strictly guard them, and cut off their contact with the capital. If the Westerners are among them, cough... what kind of role would they play...we should turn their plan against them."

Shen Yi didn't speak.

Gu Yun: "Ji Ping? "

Shen Yi suddenly asked, "Do you think it's worth it?"

Gu Yun was stunned.

Shen Yi's eyes flitted across the bloodstain on his chest, coming next to Gu Yun's ears, he forced his words to the deaf man's ears one by one: "What you think in your heart is that there is bound to be another battle between us and the foreigners. What others think is how to pull you, the general, off the horse. Do you think it's worth it?"

Of course, Gu Yun's mind could not be completely free of dilemmas. Unfortunately, having Shen Yi beside him, someone who had the tendency to explode, no matter what they think, one of them should be in charge of exploding, while the other should be in charge of calming. Shen Yi had taken the lead in the role of the former. Gu Yun had no choice but to play the latter peacefully.

Gu Yun: "You spent five liang of silver to buy that hideous hairpin for Miss Chen. Is it worth it, or is it a waste of money?"

Shen Yi: "I did humiliating things for the woman I love, it is my responsibility. Who are you humiliating yourself for?"

Gu Yun slowly replied, "As expected, there is no filial son in front of the bed. You unfilial child, you even learned to scold me already."

Shen Yi: "..."

Through half of his lifetime engaged in warfare, for how many times Gu Yun had the thought of running off, that was how many times Shen Yi had the thought of 'I no longer care about this bastard'. He shook off Gu Yun's hand, turning around and left, thinking to himself, "*If you love to die that much*."

Gu Yun: "Ji Ping!"

His hand in the air aimlessly grabbed into emptiness, his fingers wrapped with the bandaged medicine were nearly deformed, five fingers could not close, his pale skin full of scars was exposed under the bandages, causing Shen Yi to feel uncomfortable in an instant and could no longer have any attitude.

Shen Yi: "Don't move!"

Gu Yun said softly, "These two days, there must be an emissary from Dong Ying to contact us secretly. Chong Ze, after all, is still a civil officer. It depends on you... "

Shen Yi was very pained, "Alright, stop talking, I know."

Gu Yun was interrupted by him, but was not angry either. No one knew what he thought of, he suddenly laughed and gasped for a while. "Try to defend the country and become a famous general. In a hundred years, people will build a temple for you. Isn't it very good to eat incense for a living."

Shen Yi sneered, "Which god would you be? A Gate God already exists, are you going to be a Window God? A Bed God? "

"It's all the same," Gu Yun said with a low laugh. "Either way, no matter which temple people worship at… The things they ask for are all the same… For fortune, promotion, marriage...and children as

well."

Shen Yi listened and thought, *Isn't this a scammer, a matchmaker and a Guanyin Bestower of Children* all at once?*

**送子观音, Songzi Guanyin, Bodshittava from which people prayed to for children*

His heart suddenly became even more frustrated, he didn't want to be friends with such a person at all.

Gu Yun whispered, "God Shen, bring me the flute in the box at the head of the bed."

Shen Yi sighed and took out a small box that he had treasured beside the pillow. There was a brilliant white jade flute, a stack of thick, unknown seagrain paper, and several Wind Slasher hilts with different names engraved on them.

This small box seemed to contain all of Gu Yun's feelings.

"*I will not die*." Gu Yun held the cold jade flute at his fingertips and thought firmly, "*If they don't blow me up on the spot, I will not die. Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity hasn't been cured yet. There are so many people in the capital who want to trouble him. How can I...*"

What could he do? Before he could think of it, he was once again in a coma of exhaustion.

Thousands of miles away, at midnight in the Fang Manor.

Fang Qin sat in the room with his expression heavy, after being silent for a long time, he raised his head slowly, and asked, "Is it true? You heard it with your own ears? "

Kneeling in front of him, the servant shivered uncontrollably and nodded quickly.

The heir of this generation of the Fang family suddenly laughed. A moment later, he covered his face with one hand as his shoulders shook. He did not know whether he was crying or laughing. Fang Qin once advised Lu Chang to go on this road. He once thought that *Yan Wang* was ambitious, perhaps one day he would go on this road as well. What he never expected was that his own father would be the first one to go on this road.

Every scholar, at a young age, has all learned Teacher Heng Qu's four sentences: "To build a heart for heaven and earth, to build a life for the people, to continue learning for the monarch, and to open peace for all ages." Everyone had had the passion that they would one day become a man of unparalleled power and be able to carry the nation for thousands of years.

However, this point of painstaking effort will gradually be ground away by fame and wealth, by time, by the helpless flow of life, grinding and grinding, one's life would end up returning to the same old road.

From ancient times to the present, how many talented people were there, but how many true nation’s scholar exist?

国士, *a nation’s scholar, is someone with the talent of a scholar and the virtue of building a country*

That night, Fang Qin spent the whole time sitting in a daze in his study. The next morning, he ordered his wife and children to be sent away secretly.

When the first cock crowed in the morning, Fang Qin thought he would rush out and drag *Yan Wang* up to inform him of the impending premeditated rebellion.

It's a pity, although this process had been imagined hundreds of times over in his mind, it did not turn into action.

Loyalty and filial piety, it was difficult to fulfill both. He knew that he was doomed to be unable to become a nation’s scholar, he could only charge forward the path ahead.

Five days later, an ambiguous message flew into the capital and was heard by ambitious people of all kinds —— a few days later, the Foreign Affairs Ministry went to reward the army arrived at Jiangbei camp, but all of a sudden, the camp was in a completely closed off state for unknown reasons.

Fang's family received more detailed information. Grand Scholar Fang received a note from his students, on which was simply written the word 'Success'.

At this point, Grand Scholar Fang let out a long sigh of relief. Of course, he himself did not expect that it would go so smoothly. The Westerners who were covetous had helped him in the end. His heart was full of unexplained excitement: because 'half of the nation' had already been under control, and his ambition was within reach.

At the same time, Li Feng's birthday affairs were indeed put forward by the Ministry of Rites. Fang Qin took the lead and joined in. Even the *Yan Wang* Party did not come out to object. They unanimously agreed to this rarely seen extravagant activity.

Back then, Former Emperor Yuan He hosted one once a year. In the years of Long An, they gradually became more frugal. Therefore, the procedures were all ready-made. In order to ensure that the boot-licking didn't reach the legs, the Ministry of Rites had already started to make preparations secretly. Once the emperor approved of it, they immediately started to operate in an orderly manner. On that day, northwest envoys began to offer gifts one after another, the nine gates were full of fireworks, all regulations were lifted, the bells and drums roared in unison.

The emperor must depart from the palace to worship the heavens, to tell his ancestors what he had achieved during this year.

This time, he had learned his lesson. He was closely followed by thirteen imperial guards, not taking with him a single one of the unreliable civil and military officials, only the crown prince. Under the altar, *Yan Wang* led the Grand Council and a number of officials.

Sacrificing for heaven and earth, worshiping ancestors, a string of activities were carried out in order. With nothing happening this time, Li Feng finally breathed a sigh of relief, casting aside the haunting fear left from last time and ordered to return to the palace.

When the emperor took up his chariot and was about to return, and the imperial army outside the city was handing over the duty to the imperial guards, something happened.

There was no telling who suddenly shouted, "Assassins!"

Before the words were heard, several Dong Ying boomerangs broke through the air and pierce straight through the crowd officials, gazing the sleeves of a Han Lin; the old Han Lin did not manage to let out a sound, directly fainting. The internal and external guard troops responded at the same time. Some called 'protect the emperor' and some called 'catch the assassins'.

Unexpectedly, an imperial army member suddenly turned mad and slashed his sword at the crown prince. Chang Geng was nearest to him; he stepped forward and grabbed the crown prince's belt to drag him back in the blink of an eye.

In the confusion, someone shouted, "The imperial army is rebelling!"

The commander of the imperial army, who was carrying out the task of being the main guard, was still in confusion, he blurted out, "My ass!"

At this time, someone dressed in the clothes of an imperial guard took out a small crossbow in his arms and aimed at Li Feng's chariot. Li Feng almost rolled down from it. The commander of the imperial army thought: "*The imperial guards rebelled, yet they're still trying to pour the mud on us! What is this!"*

"Slow down! There are traitors in the imperial guards trying to assassinate the emperor, capture them! "

After the imperial army was changed into two departments working in parallel, in order to restrain each other, the two sides had no communication and were in a competitive relationship. One side carried out the main guarding duty, the other side cooperated in assisting and supervision. Of course, the cooperating side suffered losses. Their job was the same, but they could not show their faces in front of the emperor. How could they not feel dissatisfied?

The main guard thought that there were assassins in the imperial guards, and the coordinated guard thinks that the main guard had ill intentions. The imperial guards thought that the imperial army definitely rebelled. Under the deliberate instigation of the plotting people, the three parties were in chaos.

And almost all the generals that could be of use to the imperial court were already transferred by Gu Yun to garrisons all over the country. At present, those who were staying behind in the capital were either cowards, or malicious conspirators. All of a sudden, this place was plunged into commotion.

Fang Qin and the others saw the opportunity, deliberately rushed to Li Feng in a panic, saying altogether, "This place is dangerous, Your Majesty please leave as soon as possible."

A group of strange-looking escorts came along. Fang Qin said, "Your Majesty, please come down! We will defend Your Majesty to death!"

Li Feng didn't pay attention to many details in the panic. He grabbed Fang Qin's arm and said, "Where is the crown prince?"

Fang Qin made a signal to the imperial bodyguard and said to Li Feng, "The crown prince is under protection. Just now I saw that *Yan Wang* is also over at that side, I'm afraid we were separated. Go first, and I'll send someone to look for him."

Li Feng shouted angrily, "Summon the Northern Camp! These lawless... "

Fang Qin immediately ordered his own men to pretend to run off and 'send the summoning order'. This was what they had thought of in advance: they must not leave room for the imperial guards to react, isolate the emperor early on and cut off his contact with the imperial guards and the Northern Camp.

Fang Qin half coaxed and half lied for Li Feng to leave. At this time, all the men surrounding him had changed into the imperial guards uniform, rushing towards him in unison, Li Feng was unable to pay attention, waiting until he could, it was already too late.

At this time, a strange occurrence also happened on the front line.

The pope received the news from his spies that had mixed in the Foreign Affairs Mission. A coup had happened in Great Liang, the envoys sent from the capital to reward the army was in fact, going to carry out an assassination. They planned to recreate the scene of the Black Iron Camp in the northwest twenty years ago. Gu Yun was seriously injured and perhaps already dead. The garrison was forcibly blocking the news, but the internal situation was already chaotic; it was a good opportunity to fight back.

As usual, the pope did not believe such news; at the very least, he would send people to verify it repeatedly from other angles, but he no longer had the luxury to do so.

The Great Liang Navy cut off two most important lines of contact between them and their country, on one hand, the struggle between the Holy Land parties had been close to its climax, and on the other, their obedient colonies started a rebellion upsurge from Nanyang Islands. They truly had no other options but to go far east through Dong Ying.

The pope had never trusted the Dong Ying people. He always felt that these jackals could bite back at them any time, thus he was

eager to break this deadlock.

No one knew better than him that the prestige of the Western Navy on the water was supported by abundant energy, without a large number of *Ziliujin* as the backing, it was nothing but a pile of scrap metal.

Master Ja made a rigorous strategic deployment and sent people to the Dong Ying shogunate for cooperation.

The Dong Ying people nodded and welcomed them pleasantly, after politely sent them away, they turned back to their resident and closed the door.

A weatherbeaten Dong Ying warrior came in from the back door and took off his bamboo hat. In a low voice, he said, "I have seen General Gu."

"Then Gu Yun was not seriously injured or dead, was he?"

"I cannot say for certain. I just saw Gu Yun passing by in a hurry. My rank was not enough to start a conversation with him. But the garrison was in good order, full of artillery, without any confusion, as if ready to attack at any time. I haven't seen the so-called 'assassin group' either; if there is any, it may have been secretly taken care of. "

"I see. You have worked hard."

Chapter 126: Finale (Part III)

—

On the first day of March in the tenth year of Long An, Li Feng, Emperor of Long An had died

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The little crown prince was scared out of his wits in the chaos of battle. At a complete loss for what to do, he could only hold Chang Geng's hand tightly.

When the two armies were in disorder, all the civil and military officials fled, and the emperor's chariot laid on the ground in complete disorder. But when the people were scattered, the target became concentrated — the assassins who had deliberately stirred the water rushed towards Chang Geng and the crown prince together.

Before coming here, Lord Fang had instructed them, "*Yan Wang must be killed no matter what. If you have the chance, do not let the crown prince go either.*"

The assassins saw two of their targets were all together in the same place, especially convenient for them!

An arrow grazed over the crown prince's head. The crown prince was carried around by Chang Geng like a puppy. He couldn't even cry out. He was so scared he could only choke in silence.

All of a sudden, someone reached out and wiped away the tears on his face. The crown prince saw his Fourth Uncle wipe his tears through his hazy eyes, his raised arm exposed a black iron wrist bracelet. A *xiu zhong si* popped out in an instant, breaking an assassin's wrist. *Yan Wang* snatched the assassin's blade, spun the hilt, and swiftly delivered a slash.

"When I was your age, I was besieged by a group of hungry

wolves outside the Northern Gate." Chang Geng's voice was very stable, "At that time, there were no people anywhere. I had only a small knife with me, the kind that the countryside children play with — it was not the common wolf that chased me, but the ones the Barbarians raised with their own method, especially used to kill people. They were very big, higher than me when standing up."

Yan Wang had always been famous for his outstanding demeanor. Whether it was his enemy or his friends, they all had to admit this. Unlike most of the high-ranking officials' precious sons who grew up in the capital, he was not flashy, but different from the poor Han Lin sons or soldiers with military background. He was neither deprived nor ferocious. He appeared very calm, but not the kind of calmness of Master Liao Ran. He resembled a stone statue of a fierce god placed in a temple — awe-inspiring and intimidating, lonesome and covered in ashes. Many people had secretly mimic the calm and elegant demeanor of *Yan Wang*. It was difficult for others to associate him with hungry wolves outside the pass.

The little crown prince was stunned.

At this time, two assassins rushed forward one by one, one of them slashed at the little crown prince in Chang Geng's arm, intending to force him to back down, the other blocking his retreat from behind.

Chang Geng gave a low sneer.

How could a child who grew up playing swords with the iron puppets of the Marquis's Manor retreat in front of such an opponent of this caliber?

Chang Geng lifted his blade horizontally to block the assassin's sword. In a moment of fright, the assassin was unable to retract his sword, the sharp weapon in his hand flew away. He carelessly guarded himself with both arms but was 'cut in two' by *Yan Wang*.

Chang Geng kept on flying forward three steps, using the momentum from turning around, he turned back and threw out the blade, scared the pursuer to step back and into the point of a spear from an imperial army soldier rushing up.

The little crown prince hadn't even seen the killing of chickens, let alone the killing of people? Immediately, he closed his eyes from fright. But even then, he was still hit with the nauseating scent of blood, he weakly called, "Fourth Uncle…"

"There's nothing to be afraid of." Chang Geng said faintly, "Those who are really capable are either on the front line or are already dead. Those who are left behind are only cowards. Without the ability to fight the enemy, they can only scare the children. Are you still a child?"

The crown prince thought with grievance, "*I am a child*."

Chang Geng seemed to know what he was thinking, his lips were slightly bent upwards.

"*Still a child*," he thought, "*But that will soon change*."

At this time, the imperial army who rushed over with a spear shouted: "Your Highness! His Highness the Crown Prince! This way!"

The little crown prince instinctively wanted to run up to him, and was dragged back by Chang Geng's scabbard.

The crown prince's staggering steps had yet stabilized, his face had been splattered with blood. The shouting man was split in two, and a Heavy Armor army rushed out of nowhere——

At this time, Li Feng, who was being held tightly, finally found that the direction of the people 'escorting' him was not to go to the palace, but to run to a place where there was no one. His heart jumped, an unbelievable idea arose in his head, he immediately turned around and questioned, "What is going on? Subject Fang, where are you going to take me?"

Fang Qin kept on walking, without kneeling and bowing, he said loud and clear, "Your Majesty, I have something to say."

Li Feng could not believe this: "What are you saying? Stop! I tell you to stop! "

No one paid attention to him. Two fake guards, one on the left and one on the right, pulled up the emperor's dragon body and forced him to walk.

"*Yan Wang* Li Min, the current Qin Wang of the court, is the person I want to accuse," said Fang Qin, one word at a time. "He colluded with unscrupulous merchants, in the name of *Feng Huo* tickets, he sold official ranks to the point of no shame. This is his first major crime. Born as a son, yet he has no sense of filial piety towards the first emperor, instead, he often sleeps in the Marquis's manor at night in order to win over the army's heart, continuing to call ‘yifu’ even after receiving his title. This is the second major crime. His heart is that of an animal, not placing either the ruler nor his own father in his eyes…"

If Li Feng still couldn't understand what was going on even now, his brain must have been soaked by water. He was both surprised and frightened, he immediately shouted: "Fang Qin, what are you going to do?"

Fang Qin said: "Your Majesty, we have set up many ambushes, only waiting for that traitor to be killed. Although us officials are incompetent, we are willing to follow the example of our renowned predecessors, if the traitor cannot be controled, we swore to use our very lives to rid the ruler's side of traitorous subjects!"

Before his words were finished, all the members of his party immediately agreed in unison, "Sworn to rid of traitorous subjects!"

Li Feng was stunned and dumbfounded. When he cast his eyes around, everywhere is full of strange faces, surrounded by the false and ferocious imperial army in armor. The familiar faces in the court were now becoming more and more strange. Each of them seemed to be a demon in human skin, ready to rush at him any time with their

fangs.

These were the emperor's subjects.

Was it like this when Emperor Wu was in power?

Was it like this when former Emperor Yuan He was in power?

Li Feng knew that he could not compare with Emperor Wu's life that was spent opening territories, but could he not even compare to his own father who he had always been secretly dissatisfied with?

He could not accept this in any case.

However, no matter how difficult it was for him to accept, this seems to be the truth, because during the reign of Yuan He, there were no foreign enemies surrounding the capital, nor waves of traitors trying to pull him down from the throne.

At that moment, Li Feng had no time to have too much anger or fear. He only felt a slap across his face. Since he ascended the throne, it has been more than three thousand days and nights, yet he never had a single peaceful sleep, exhausted himself night long. Now, it seemed that it was all in vain. Instead, wouldn't it be better for him to be a coward spending all day in the arms of women and lamenting?

He watched his self-esteem crack and wither to dust in front of these cold rebels.

"Courageous…," Li Feng's entire body shook, "You are all truly...truly courageous! "

Fang Qin bowed his head and avoided meeting his eyes. At this point, Fang Qin knew he was no longer able to pretend to be a loyal and good minister: "Your Majesty, forgive me. That Li Min is covering the sky with one hand, does not put the laws in his eyes, disrespecting his ancestors. We, officials, are concerned about the country, there is no other way, we can only resort to this lowly strategy, our crime worth a thousand deaths. However, at present, the traitors are rampant, his party and forces are all over the country; once *Yan Wang* dies, his people will cause trouble. Your Majesty

please make a decision early and clean them up."

Li Feng clenched his teeth, "You still want to threaten me?"

Fang Qin knelt down on the ground without changing his face and said: "I dare not. I know that Your Majesty is currently frightened and uncertain, thus I have prepared the decree in advance. Please have a look."

With that, someone immediately put forward an imperial edict with both hands. As expected, it was written in detail and covered all aspects, the only thing left was for it to be stamped by the jade seal.

Li Feng jerked away from the two men who were holding him. He stepped forward abruptly, grabbed the collar of the man holding the imperial edict with his hands, then gave a good shove ——

In his rage, Li Feng completely forgot his limping leg, which had never quite healed. Not standing firmly, the man he pushed was still, yet he had already tilted towards the side first.

In broad daylight, surrounded by a group of Great Liang's citizens, yet not a single one supported him. The real aristocratic nobles and the fake imperial guards, everyone watched on as the Son of Heaven fell to the ground in anger with disdain and indifference.

At this time, a man in guard uniform trotted all the way over, he must also be a fake. He looked at Li Feng first, then turned his head to the other side and said to Fang Qin, "My Lord, the traitor had been killed!"

Li Feng's legs were devoid of strength. He sat on the ground and forced out a few words from his teeth:"What about the crown prince?"

The fake guard first glanced at Fang Qin, with permission, he cautiously said to Li Feng, "The crown prince… the assassins already...Ah, Your Majesty please endure this loss."

Li Feng's mind exploded.

His chest was ice cold. When he came back to his mind, he

already coughed out a mouthful of blood. Li Feng sat on the ground and watched the thick and black blood flow down his fingertips. He wondered, "*How could I become this miserable?"*

Fang Qin's face flickered with hesitation. He subconsciously extended his hand, seemingly wanted to help Li Feng, but still didn't touch him. His arm hung in the air, then was retracted. His hesitation faded like the tide. He said coldly: "Your Majesty does not have only the crown prince. Even if the Third Prince is young, there is still the First Prince who is diligent, studious, intelligent, and kind. Please take care of your body and prioritize the important matters at present!"

With that, he pulled the ‘imperial edict’ in his underling's hands and brought it to Li Feng: "Please have a look at it!"

Li Feng slapped Fang Qin's ‘fake imperial edict’ aside: "In your dreams!"

Fang Qin silently wiped the part of his face hit by the fake imperial edict, kept the kneeling posture, leaned forward slightly, sighed softly, and said in a very gentle tone: "Your Majesty, your dragon body is in our hands, even if there are hundreds outside...Even if the Northern Camp comes, no one will dare to make a move. Today, this imperial edict, you must sign it whether or not you are willing to. What's wrong with the First Prince? I heard that he is gentle and introverted, and has a royal demeanor. He is different from the bastard child Yan Wang, whose origin is unknown. That is what the royal family of Great Liang should have, don't you think?"

Li Feng felt a sharp pain in his chest. His whole body felt as if it had fallen into an ice cave. His heart and organs aching. He took a few breaths and said with a sneer: "And then? Of course, you will not wait for me to settle this debt afterward. What are you going to do with me? House arrest? Or simply kill me? The empress’s body is delicate and is unable to manage anything. The eldest prince’s mother's family had their possessions confiscated and beheaded. He possessed all the qualities to become an excellent puppet...such great calculation!"

Fang Qin shook his head irrefutably: "Your Majesty, the crown prince met his demise. That traitor Li Min has also been killed. Oh, of course, if you like, you can also issue an imperial edict to pass the throne to the Third Prince. But His Third Highness is still too small to go to school, isn't this making light of the ancestors' nation?"

There may be tens of thousands of ethical restrictions on a person. They seemed to be firmly bound, but in fact, they were not so strong. As long as one pulled down their integrity once, they could be as shameless as they wished in the future, without any restraint.

At least Fang Qin himself did not expect that one day, he would say such words with his expression unchanged.

Just as he was slightly distracted, the ground suddenly vibrated, all the people presented were momentarily tensed — such neat footsteps could only come from a well-trained team, and judging from the tremor, there was at least a Heavy Armor in it!

Was it the Northern Camp?

Fang Qin's heart thumped. This was not part of their plan. It seemed that something had happened! He immediately waved his hand, a few underlings rushed up to capture Li Feng: "Troubling Your Majesty to please escort us for a while."

A group of fake guards surrounded Li Feng on all sides and took him toward another direction. Unexpectedly, just after turning a corner, the people leading the way suddenly stopped — there was a team of imperial guards that had been waiting for some time in front!

How on earth did they manage to get away?

No... getting out of the commotion was nothing. Although it was a little faster than planned, once they caught wind of what was going on in the palace, the guards will instantly mobilize their full forces, it would be very easy to suppress the situation.

The question was, how did they find this place?

Fang Qin was confused for a moment. He looked back and saw that the spy who came to report that 'Yan Wang and the crown

prince are dead' had disappeared.

There were traitors!

The footsteps behind them were approaching gradually. After looking again, the Heavy Armors that caused them to panic was just a bunch of iron puppets pulled out of someone's house!

Fang Qin broke out in a cold sweat and suddenly returned to his mind, knowing that they had been trapped by someone.

However, it was already too late for him to think deeply. He grabbed Li Feng and held his sword against the emperor's fragile neck and shouted, "Who dares to move!"

The emperor was a precious object; no one wanted to bear the reputation of indirect regicide. The steps of the guards stopped for a while.

Fang Qin never dreamed that he would do something this rebellious and immoral. For a moment, he was scared to death. His throat was dry, gasping for a few sharp breaths. His brain resembled a mass of glue and was unable to think of a solution. The disordered imperial army finally arrived. At the same time, there was the sound of Eagle outside the gates: they were the Eagles of the Northern Camp seeking permission to pass the anti-air net.

There was a sound next to them, one of the underlings unexpectedly knelt down from fright.

Fang Qin gritted his teeth hard and said to Emperor Long An, "Your Majesty, please order them to withdraw."

Li Feng was in a very miserable state yet he still sneered: "In your dreams."

At this time, an arrow suddenly came from behind and grazed past Fang Qin's shoulder. Although it did not cause any substantial damage, the burning pain at the moment of skin tearing and flesh breaking broke the string in Fang Qin's brain.

The delicate balance had been broken.

Li Feng saw the chance, pushing him hard, intended to rush out at once.

However, the limping leg once again held him back. Li Feng was just about to take a step, but his feet were soft, he stumbled out uncontrollably. At the same time, Fang Qin raised his sword and chased him, instinctively thrusting his sword forward ——

Li Feng convulsed violently, like a dying fish making its last struggle. Fang Qin's face paled. He unconsciously released his hand holding the sword and stepped back three steps, staring at the sword embedded into Li Feng's back with wide eyes as if seeing a demon.

The imperial guards rushed up in an instant.

All of a sudden, Li Feng heard a child's crying voice piercing his ears through countless disorderly subjects and traitors. He raised his head with difficulty and saw the little crown prince running towards him as he called ‘Royal Father’. Not far behind him, *Yan Wang*, his Fourth Brother, was standing there unharmed. Meeting his gaze, *Yan Wang* stopped his step, placing both hands behind his back, with his special kind of calm eyes, looking down from above at the incredibly miserable emperor.

The imperial guards and the imperial army rushed up in a frenzy, and soon cleaned up the dumbfounded disorderly officials and thieves. Li Feng was carried out. The leader of the imperial guards rushed to find an imperial doctor, but they already knew in their hearts it was useless.

The little crown prince fell on him and sobbed helplessly.

Li Feng wanted to touch his delicate little son very much, but before he could gather his strength, a hand fell on the crown prince's shoulder. *Yan Wang* silently stood aside and gently stroked the prince's shoulder and neck as a comforting gesture. Everyone would think that this was a pair of both sad and warming uncle and nephew. Only Li Feng felt that he understood the threat implied in *Yan Wang*’s gesture.

Li Feng stared at *Yan Wang*'s placid eyes, remembered his mother's bitter and hateful words before she died many years ago — *those barbarian women are all evildoers, and the little wild seeds that are born from them are also ominous things that will harm the country and the people.*

The 'ominous thing' that was *Yan Wang* knelt down on one knee, but his hand still stopped between the crown prince's shoulder and neck, and asked Li Feng in a low voice, "Is there anything else Royal Brother wishes to command?"

Li Feng: "You... You... "

Yan Wang pressed his voice lower, and said in his ear, "Please rest assured, your brother will take good care of the crown prince."

Li Feng's lips trembled violently, a fire seemed to be in his eyes, then went out slowly with the passage of his life. He reached out a hand tremblingly, *Yan Wang* held it in midair.

...It turned out that such an ice-cold hand could also create such false respect and affection between brothers.

At this time, the ministers who had just been scattered by the rebellion army rushed in succession, charging like sheep and cattle. At an angle where no one could see, Chang Geng faintly smiled at Li Feng, his tone of voice sounding very sad and sincere: "Royal Brother, what do you wish to say?"

The little prince cried so much that he couldn't stand up. Li Feng looked at him then closed his eyes gently.

He had never compromised with anyone in his life, and had always been hard-headed to the end. Who knew that the last course fell into this desperate situation, traitors were on all sides, with layers or schemes, yet his young and inexperienced son still had no place to be entrusted to after his death.

"I... was mediocre for all my life," he murmured in an inaudible voice. The scholars of the two chambers and the attendants in his daily life knew what he was going to say, for a moment, they had no

mind to cry and mourn. They all rushed to listen attentively while holding their breath, for fear of missing just one word from the emperor.

Li Feng's eyes seemed to be glistening with tears, he continued: "I am ashamed facing the heavens, embarrassed towards the people. For more than ten years, my heart...had been in a state of unrest. After I pass away...the crown prince...is still too young, it is difficult for him to shoulder this heavy task…"

Chang Geng turned his face gently and looked at the iron puppets far away from the crowd. One of the lifeless iron monsters was watching him tenderly. It once practiced swordplay with him, carried snacks for him, and followed him to knock at that man's door countless times.

At this time, its eyes slightly flickered with purple light, as if there was a person in the far front, watching him quietly through this lifeless big puppet.

"...Passing the position to *Yan Wang*, to succeed the throne after me. Do not disappoint our ancestors. "

On the first day of March in the tenth year of Long An, Li Feng, Emperor of Long An had died, dying in the hands of disorderly officials and traitors. In his final moment, he himself had skipped the crown prince and passed the throne to *Yan Wang*. It was indeed quite strange.

Yan Wang decisively cleaned up the rebellious family and uprooted several nobles in the capital that were involved.

Rightfully cleansing the imperial court with blood. The Grand Council pushed three laws and decrees overnight, strongly stabilizing the situation in the capital.

But before Jiang Chong and the others finished performing three refusal and three requests, *Yan Wang* — the emperor to be, left the capital without warning.

If not for his trusted men at the Grand Council, who have experienced all kinds of chaos and were able to carry the sky even if it collapsed, things would have been chaotic again.

Chang Geng summoned Jiang Chong and instructed him a lot of things in detail, putting in a box the orders and decrees written in advance for him. He appeared to be very eager to leave, wishing he could fly off right away. Jiang Chong only thought it was due to the war situation in Liangjiang, thus he might have to go in the near future, but he still didn't expect to be so caught off guard about his departure, he was in shock when hearing the news the next day.

Chang Geng borrowed a team of Eagle armor guards from the Northern Camp overnight, intending to fly directly to the south.

He was certain that the front lines of Liangjiang could not be peaceful — whether it was the two Lin Yuan spies in the foreign affairs group, Cao Chun Hua who he sent to Gu Yun's side, or even Gu Yun himself — their letters all seemed to state that the front line was alright, and the day to recover thousands miles of land was upon them. This was not normal.

Gu Yun who only spoke of the good and not the bad was one thing, but the reason Lin Yuan bore this name was because they must possess the clarity and caution when 'facing the abyss, walking on thin ice'. Even if the front line had really achieved overwhelming victory, they would find out all the possible risks in it, and remind it to both Gu Yun and the owner of the Lin Yuan wooden emblem in the capital city respectively.

But no, they did not mention a word. This was not right.

Chang Geng slowly carried out his plan in the capital, it all seemed to be easy, but in fact, he had soon been in a state of unrest.

But he could not visit Gu Yun in this life and death situation. There were too many variables in the capital. Until the last moment, he did not know whether he could achieve his goal smoothly or not —— once a small accident occurs, he might have to pick up the sword himself and bear the reputation of 'disorderly subjects and traitors' and 'murderer of brother and nephew', that was why he could not have even a little involvement with Gu Yun in this whole process.

He could only hold the man on the front line in a place where he could not see.

It's impossible for the Eagle to fly north and south without rest. Just when Chang Geng was anxiously waiting for the Eagle armor to replenish fuel in a military post station, a red-label report rushed by and was stopped by the commander of the Northern Camp and was sent to Chang Geng.

The Western troops from the Dong Ying sea were mobilized, launching a counter attack ——

The author has something to say:

Not the last chapter, hold tight =w=

The End: A Feather in the Eternal Sky [万古云霄一羽毛] | Chapter 127: New Emperor

—

"I hate you." Chang Geng said, "I hate you to death, Gu Zi Xi."

—

"When will the Eagle be ready?" Chang Geng asked while suppressing his anxiety and anger as much as possible.

The commander of the Northern Camp, who accompanied him, said in a low voice, "Your Majesty, please take a moment to calm down. It will be done soon."

"Don't call 'Your Majesty'. That title is unjustified and undeserved." Chang Geng pushed the flattery words aside, after saying this, he was also aware of his own restlessness. He took a deep breath and grabbed his sleeve as if seeking comfort.

He had a piece of cloth in his sleeve. There was no telling whether it was from tearing by hand or by cutting. It appeared as if a dog was gnawing it; Gu Yun placed it in the home letter for him. At first glance, one could not tell what it was. Gu Yun claimed in the letter that this was a part of a belt he didn't need. What he lost was a year’s worth of longing. Waiting until it was fulfilled in the future, he would ask him to help sew it back. He also said that he had one wish that he could not write in this letter and will let him know in the next.

"The imperial edict of the former emperor has been issued, the rest are only formalities. Why should Your Majesty have to be so rigid about it?" The commander interrupted his thoughts; quite different from Tan Hong Fei, the current commander of the Northern Camp was excellent in both handling affairs and socializing, he sneaked a glance at the new emperor's expression and said, "Your Majesty, think about it: Marshal Gu has already cut off the supply line of the Westerners, their counter-attack is only the last effort. With Marshal in charge, why should Your Majesty worry?"

Chang Geng didn't answer. He knew that although Liu Zhong and Lin Yuan had sent back the false news about the ‘success’ of the Foreign Affairs Mission, it must have been reviewed and acquiesced to by Gu Yun, then closed the Liangjiang camp later just to lure the enemy to invade. He calmed down to think about it carefully. This time, Gu Yun borrowed the east wind from the aristocratic families' rebel in the capital city, and brought the Westerners down at the same time. This war was enough to be recorded in history. There's really nothing to worry about.

The commander of the Northern Camp could understand about all these things, how could Chang Geng not understand them?

But his heart was burning with anxiety.

... Of course, perhaps the burning was not simply from anxiety, but from a long period of longing.

At this time, the people of the post station came to report that Eagle Armor was ready to go. As soon as Chang Geng got up, three letters from the Liangjiang garrison were sent one after another — these were not for the capital city. Once the front line started to exchange fire, they would send an order to warn the surrounding military post stations and the local garrison to prepare for reinforcements or to raise their vigilance.

The first one was ‘enemy invasion’, the second one was ‘major campaign’, the third one was directly raised to the highest alert level, ‘the enemy is in full swing, all forces facing against the enemy’ — all within one incense time.

The commander panicked, he immediately advised: "Your Majesty, the alarm level of the front line is too high. Please take a moment to wait for the news at the post station, and for the other side to become more stable…"

Before he finished, Chang Geng stood up and said, "You're right. You stay."

Commander: "..."

At this time, all the people present in the frontline are in a state of high tension, no one knew that the new emperor was about to arrive unexpectedly.

It had been more than a month since Gu Yun was injured at sea. When he was guarding the capital, from being dug out of the corpse heap to being fixed in steel-plate and setting out northwest again, it was only a few days. Now it has only been two or three years, but these things have become the ‘achievements of the past’.

In the meantime, he had been in and out of consciousness for more than half a month and had lost a lot of weight. Later, Shen Yi said that at that time, his breathing was weak as if he was going to pass at any time. There was no telling what he had clung onto to last until the present. In the end, the danger came to pass, but it was still very hard for him to stand up. He had to save up strength for half a day to walk around the tent reluctantly. He did not dare to remove the steel plate on his body either, and his heart ached after sitting for a long time.

Gu Yun had never been afraid of pain: because he was used to it, and he always thought that pain was a kind of self-protection of the body and was not a bad thing. This was the first time in his life that he learned the feeling of being emptied by pain.

Of course, there was also good news. The good news was that his eyes were slowly recovering. Yao Zhen sent someone to find an old folk craftsman to make a special glass mirror for him. After wearing it, he could barely see objects within one foot. For better or worse, he could communicate with others. The wound on the throat was not deep, it had healed, but his voice would become very hoarse once speaking too much.

It's a pity that he could not talk yet.

The Westerners were obviously risking their last life. The commander of the other side was the old pope who was equal to Gu Yun many times in naval battle. Although there was a group of hesitant Dong Ying people in the middle stirring the water and made vague contact with Great Liang in the early days, if they wanted the Dong Ying people to fully take their side, Great Liang’s navy must

occupy an absolute advantage first and foremost — otherwise, there was no telling who will be at the receiving end of Dong Ying's stab.

From the time when the Dong Ying sent someone to give them a hint that the Westerners were preparing for the last fight, Gu Yun had not been able to have a whole night of sleep.

There were too many things in his heart and too much pain in his wound —— it's mainly the pain in his wound. He often laid on the bed until dawn. Even if one soldier hadn't moved outside, he had fought hundreds of battles in his mind, wishing he could consider every possibility at once.

For this extremely dangerous endgame, Gu Yun transferred the entire three factions of Black Iron Camp to the northwest. He Rong Hui and the others intended to help the younger people, and also brought some young generals such as General Cai and the others together in order for them to gain more experience.

At this time, Shen Yi and Yao Zhen cooperated on the water, He Rong Hui and the real Black Eagles were in the air, the strongest group of armed forces honed by the entirety of Great Liang in the years of war and chaos were all in the battlefield of Jiangnan.

This time, there was more than Gu Yun in the commander's tent of the army, young General Cai and the old subordinates of the Black Iron Camp were also gathered here. The Eagles came and went, all war reports were presented and passed down at the highest speed.

The Westerners first tried to encircle the harbor with heavy artillery, trying to catch them by surprise at the time of the ‘internal chaos in the Liangjiang Camp’. Under the ‘panic’, they were indeed defeated, so they had to set up the ‘iron fence’ and resist passively.

The ‘iron fence’ had just been reinforced recently, its defense was incredible. A group of pioneers hid behind them to snipe whenever the enemy was careless, causing the Westerners to waste their own artillery.

The ambush was quickly arranged. Yao Zhen was already on the warship. Shen Yi and He Rong Hui were ready to stand by at any

time after finishing the whole assembly. The news of ‘the emperor's death’ came from the orderly exchange of war reports and orders.

This white and green urgent letter stood out clearly in a pile of war reports. At first, hearing that it was the court's business, they left it unattended. After the formation had been laid out, the Westerners temporarily rested their artillery, young General Cai happily took the letter tube.

Shen Yi had gone out. Xiao Cai helped Gu Yun open it and asked curiously, "Marshal, green mark indicates an important letter of the court. What does a white mark mean?"

Gu Yun has been holding on for half a day, all his energy was exhausted. He pressed his forehead hard and asked at the same time: "...What?"

Xiao Cai glanced at his unsightly complexion and dared not disturb him anymore. He quickly pulled a blanket over Gu Yun and helped him to lie down. "Take a rest first. I'll call you if there is something."

With that, the young man stepped back to one side, quietly taking apart the tube, intending to put it into the pile of ‘to be discussed later’, waiting to be dealt with after battle.

However, he was stunned after one glance. After all, the little general was only in his twenties. He had always been a vanguard running on the frontline under his father's command. He had never faced the changes in the imperial court directly. He was momentarily dumbfounded.

He Rong Hui was washing his face while commanding the guard to prepare an Eagle Armor for him. Looking back, he saw his stupefied appearance and asked, "Don't stand there Xiao Cai. Get ready to follow me. What are you waiting for?"

General Cai blinked hard and murmured: "Brother He, they said...His Majesty had passed away…"

After Gu Yun was seriously injured, in order to take care of him,

they had made the marshal's tent especially warm. He Rong Hui was very hot, he had to wash his face with cold water in the doorway every other time. He was bending forward, the water on his face would drip down his beard. Hearing this, he straightened up slowly and said: "What?"

"The emperor died..." Xiao Cai licked his lips at a loss. He hesitated for a moment, then gathered his courage to kneel beside Gu Yun's bed and carefully pulled Gu Yun's robe. He whispered, "Marshal, Marshal."

"He can't hear you if you call like that." He Rong Hui strode forward, dragged up Gu Yun, grabbed him by the shoulder and shook him a few times, shouting loudly like a gong, "Marshal! Marshal! Wake up! Something major happened! That Emperor kid is dead! "

Young General Cai: "..."

Gu Yun just had a little vague consciousness, woken up by his shaking, his expression confused.

He Rong Hui suddenly thought of something, He turned around and asked Xiao Cai, "No, if he died then who is going to be the emperor? The...brat about this tall?"

**T/N: Li Feng is the kid and the crown prince is the brat*

As he said this, he reached out his hand and made a comparison on his waist. His big fan-like hand pushed down with disrespect. The corners of his eyes were filled with disdain.

General Cai: "Before His Majesty died, he had passed the throne to His Royal Highness *Yan Wang*."

Although He Rong Hui was rough and crude, he was not stupid. Hearing this, he was stunned on the spot and said in surprise, "Didn't pass it on to his son but passed it to *Yan Wang* instead? It doesn't make sense. Did he take the wrong medicine? "

Gu Yun watched their lips in a hurry. He finally understood what they were talking about. He woke up completely from fright, "Show me!"

The news in the marshal's tent was interrupted for a short time because of this unexpected accident. Shen Yi who was getting ready and Cao Chun Hua who was dressed as Gu Yun, having not received any order for a while, seeing how it was quite strange, they sent someone to ask.

No one expected that the legendary new emperor had arrived in person before everyone could digest this news!

During the war, the garrison was heavily guarded. At first, the guards thought they had heard it wrong. Until the commander of the northern battalion took out the tiger emblem in the hands of the emperor, only then did a group of guards rushed to report the news. Chang Geng didn't wait for him but brought people inside directly. Before he could get to the marshal's tent, he had seen Cao Chun Hua who was preparing to go to the warship.

Cao Chun Hua, with a face the same as Gu Yun's, suddenly bumped into Chang Geng. The two stared at each other with wide eyes. Reunited after a long time, Chang Geng’s heart was beating like mad. Before he could breathe easily, he saw that ‘Gu Yun’ seemed to be greatly frightened. His eyes shifted, he pulled the reins of the horse strongly, without saying anything, he turned around intending to run off.

Chang Geng: "..."

After this action, Chang Geng could tell who it was even if he used his eyebrows to look. He was just about to open his mouth to scold the other, but as the words came to his lips, he was afraid of destroying some kind of secret deployment of Gu Yun. He rushed to catch up with him, grabbing ‘Gu Yun”s reins, stopping his horse, and squeezed two words out of his teeth: "Xiao. Cao."

Cao Chun Hua wanted to cry but had no tears; he lowered his head and looked at Chang Geng's expression of demanding payment of debts, and frantically rolled down from the horse.

At this time, he still has not heard the big news in the capital, he cried and whispered, "Your Highness."

Chang Geng glared at him fiercely: "I asked you to take care of him for me, yet you just obeyed his every word? Doing a hasty job time and time again!"

Cao Chun Hua used Gu Yun's face to make a pained look filled with shamelessness. Chang Geng's stomach ached as he turned another way. He really didn't understand how this kid managed to sneak into the enemy's line several times without being discovered.

"While in action, there could still be moments when a general cannot obey the command," Cao Chun Hua whispered in his ear while leading Chang Geng, "Without Marshal's permission, I...I...I could not send any news even if I wanted to…"

Chang Geng huffed angrily, it seemed that he had let it go this time and asked, "What are you all playing this time? True and false Marshal?"

Cao Chun Hua's organs were flipping upside down, he hummed in response to cover it up. While dealing with Chang Geng, he sneaked a glance at Shen Yi's side. He stalled Chang Geng on this side, while Shen Yi on the other end ran off to the tent. The two were 'luring the tiger away from the mountain' in their own camp. One was delaying the 'enemy situation' in a panic, the other rushed back to the Marshal's Tent to deliver the news.

Seeing that Shen Yi had turned around and rushed back to the tent, Cao Chun Hua finally heaved a sigh of relief. However, before he could finish sighing, he suddenly heard Chang Geng saying, "Who are you looking at?"

Cao Chun Hua: "..."

Chang Geng felt more and more that something was wrong. He left Cao Chun Hua behind. Having spent more than a month in Liangjiang camp before, he could find the location of the marshal's tent at a glance and made a stride for it.

"Your Highness! Your Highness!" Cao Chun Hua grabbed Chang Geng's sleeve and swallowed his saliva with difficulty, "Your Highness, you must...stay calm later."

At this time, Shen Yi Ran to Gu Yun in panic, as if he had been chased back by the Western pope on the sea monster: "Zi - Zi - Zi Xi! "

He Rong Hui asked with irritation: "Brother Ji Ping, why are you so dejected?"

Shen Yi could not be bothered with him. He charged towards Gu Yun's bedside, his breathing uneven: "Your little Highness arrived, you - you..."

In the tent, people were still immersed in the shock of '*Yan Wang* actually became emperor'. For a while, they didn't know who Shen Yi referred to as 'little Highness'. He Rong Hui and Xiao Cai stared at each other. Gu Yun slowly let Shen Yi's lip language run by his mind once, then asked with astonishment, "Chang Geng?"

Shen Yi nodded rapidly.

Gu Yun suddenly lost all color and almost jumped up, but with no strength, he could not manage to jump. As if he was caught red-handed by his wife for fooling around, his tongue was tied in a knot: "Is there a place under the bed for me to hide? Don't block the way Old He, move aside, move aside, *cough, cough...* "

Under an emergency, Gu Yun's wound on his throat that has not completely healed yet caused him to cough violently. Before he could finish coughing, a faint spring breeze came from the outside of the tent and brushed the back of the deaf and blind man's pale hand. Through the special liuli glass, Gu Yun faintly saw a tall silhouette standing at the entry.

Gu Yun: "..."

It's over.

For a while, the tent was dead silent. Gu Yun was simply frightened, while the others were startled from witnessing the new emperor in the letter standing in front of them.

Only Shen Yi broke the silence with an off the wall remark: "You cannot blame me for being slow."

He Rong Hui had met *Yan Wang* who escorted the military ration before in the northwest, he was the first to respond in time, he opened his mouth, "Your Majesty?"

Everyone seemed to have awakened from a trance, wanting to greet him with a grand courtesy. Chang Geng's eyes didn't leave Gu Yun. He waved his hand stiffly and barely held on to his calm exterior. "Last time I met you gentlemen, we still referred to each other as brothers. There's no need."

Shen Yi was in confusion, he looked at Chang Geng slowly walking closer, even politely nodding his head to him, then going past him and towards the bed, staring at Gu Yun until his eyes hurt as if being pinned by needles. But he still had to look.

Gu Yun's body was covered with steel plates in many places, and the bandages under his robe were still stained with blood. The exposed collarbone and wrists seemed to only have a layer of fragile skin wrapped around his bones and flesh. There was not even a ray of blood on his lips. The special liuli glass on his face had several layers of lenses, almost pasted on half of his face. The other eye was dazed and couldn’t focus properly, yet he could still see the tension that was not easy to detect.

Chang Geng, in full view of the public, slowly sat down beside Gu Yun's bed, pulled the blanket for him, glanced at the opened letter tube beside him, then told the commander of the Northern Camp who followed him into the tent, "Take the Black Tiger Emblem, tell the Jiaos, Armors, Eagles, and other generals: as I* am here, advancing and retreating together with you gentlemen, you will certainly be invincible and victorious."

**T/N: Chang Geng is using the pronoun emperors use to refer to themselves ^q^*

All the soldiers in the marshal’s tent kept silent for a while, then no one knew who was the one who started it, they exclaimed '*Long live the emperor*!' in unison.

The voice quickly spread out from the marshal’s tent and flew over the whole camp as if growing wings. For the first time in

hundreds of years, two Tiger Emblems appeared at the same location, as if a sea god's staff* was pinned on the military flag soaring in the air, unshakable by neither waves or artillery. Even though the new emperor had not been officially crowned, he had been accepted by the generals of the four regions.

**reference to the sea god's staff/Jingu Bang wielded by Sun Wukong in Journey to the West. Its inscription indicates that the staff follows the commands of its owner*

When the Western cannons attacked the iron fence again, Gu Yun did not dare to delay anymore. The generals rushed out quickly, each performed his own duties. They took orders and left one after another. The messenger retired to the outside of the tent. At last, only Gu Yun and Chang Geng were left inside.

At the last moment when all outsiders left, Gu Yun was at a loss for what to say. Chang Geng suddenly seemed as if his spine was robbed, his whole body swayed and almost collapsed. His chest heaved violently several times, he seemed to be in extreme pain and unable to breathe at the same time. He covered his chest with one hand, gritted his teeth hard, his back tensed as if about to break.

Gu Yun was frightened. He hurriedly propped up against one arm and carefully pressed it on his back: "Chang Geng, what's the matter?"

Chang Geng pulled down his hand and clasped it in his palm in a panic. He was holding it desperately like a life-saving straw, continued to gasp for breath and unable to let out a word, the tendons on his temples became visible.

'Raising' him to this age, Gu Yun was never aware that he had any heart disease or asthma. He immediately called out: "Military doctor, come..."

The guard waiting at the door just poke his head in.

Chang Geng squeezed a few words out of his throat: "Get out! Don't come in! "

The guard did not understand, but he didn't dare to disobey the

imperial order and hurriedly withdrew.

Gu Yun looked at him at a loss. Chang Geng's eyes were congested. His pupils seemed to be separated, but were put together again by a needle. He turned to Gu Yun slowly. Marshal Gu tried to ready himself for a scolding.

But after waiting for a long time, Chang Geng only asked slowly, "If I came a little later, would I have not been able to see you again?"

Gu Yun: "..."

"I'm far away in the capital, listening to people's exclaims and cheers, waiting for you to come back happily. I want to show you the steam rail line that will be connected soon. I want to talk to you about many things, I want to sew the torn clothing back for you. Then what?" Chang Geng asked gently, grasping Gu Yun's hand and slowly tightening it. He looked down at Gu Yun's pale hand. "Can I still wait for you?"

Gu Yun felt as if he had been pierced by a steel needle, he was instantly at a loss for words.

"I hate you." Chang Geng said, "I hate you to death, Gu Zi Xi."

This sentence, from the first time Gu Yun left him behind in the Marquis's Manor, secretly running to the northwest by himself, had been suppressed in his heart accompanied by frequent attacks of Bone of Impurity.

Now, after a long and torturous treatment, most of the Bone of Impurity had been cured. No longer needing to suppress it, he finally said it aloud.

Chang Geng suddenly collapsed, temporarily straying from the path of 'rather shed blood than shed tears' he had chosen from childhood.

In the tent, His Majesty the new emperor who just now still vigorously said he will be beside the generals, sobbed aloud in pain.

T/N: There's still one more chapter

Chapter 128: The End and Beginning

Gu Yun was at a loss for words. He wanted to open his arms to hug him, but the other did not budge even after pulling twice, he had to sit aside quietly and not say a word, waiting for Chang Geng to cry out all the grievances that accumulated for more than ten years.

However, it seemed that the new emperor's luck was not so good. He couldn't even cry to his heart's content. Before he was even exhausted, there was a blast outside causing the whole tent to shake violently.

Then came the sharp cry of huge Eagle wings across the sky from far to near. Chang Geng only had time to turn his back. An Eagle Armor herald rushed in: "Marshal, the iron fence is broken, and the Westerners had entered the encirclement!"

Gu Yun's fingertip was still stained with Chang Geng's tears. He quietly tightened his hand and nodded calmly, "I know. Hold them down as planned."

The herald's toes touched the ground only for a moment, he turned and flew away again.

Only now did Chang Geng turn to look at him. The tears on his face were still wet, appearing very pitiful. Gu Yun could not bear this expression the most. He was disarmed on the spot and softly coaxed: "Chang Geng, come here, I'll wipe your tears."

Chang Geng: "Where are your sweet words?"

Gu Yun sighed quietly and lowered his voice a little: "Darling come here, I will lick your tears clean."

Chang Geng: "..."

He was momentarily unable to let out a word from anger.

However, as he was stupefied for a second, Gu Yun had struggled to get up by the bedside. He could hardly bear the strength on his waist. When he got up, the steel plate between his legs hit the

edge of the small bed heavily. His neck tendon raised abruptly from the bandage at the neckline. His messy hair spread across his shoulder and through the long chain of the liuli glass.

Chang Geng: "What are you doing!"

He stepped forward, trying to reach out and hold Gu Yun down, unexpectedly, Gu Yun took this chance and held him in his arms.

After Gu Yun made this move, cold sweat began to break out on his forehead. Most of his body weight was placed on Chang Geng's body. He was short of breath, the steel plate that pressed on him was hindering in between the two. He sighed, closing his eyes gently, stroking Chang Geng's tense back, and whispered, "Let me hug you, I miss you so much. Then whether you want to scold me or fight me afterward, I won't fight back, alright?"

Chang Geng had just calmed down a bit, his nose began to sting again, he grabbed Gu Yun's waist uncontrollably, feeling that the access part of the belt was not simply from missing the part in the letter: "I....."

As soon as he said a word, his voice was drowned in frenzied cannon fire and was interrupted again.

Gu Yun slightly turned his head, kissed his face, then actually kept to his words and followed his tears all the way down, finally stopped on the lips with a little taste of tears. Chang Geng's lips were shaking all the while, not knowing whether it was from pain or anger or excitement. Gu Yun stopped for a moment, the tip of his tongue parted his lips.

Chang Geng's hands holding his waist suddenly tightened——

...It's a pity that he hadn't tasted the sweetness yet when there's another loud Eagle sound outside that even a half-deaf could hear.

Chang Geng: "..."

Can they cut it!

The two armies are facing off, so many elite generals and a whole

new generation of generals of Great Liang are gathered in this war. Do these bastards have to come to the marshal tent to ask for instructions for every single thing?

In this situation, was there anything wrong with His Majesty not considering he was in the middle of blazing artillery, crying and acting spoiled at the commander of four sides?

The Black Eagle rushed in: "Marshal, seeing that the situation is not right, the Westerners are getting ready to escape! General Shen stopped the enemy's main ship with the sea cuttles. General He asked when a large number of Black Eagles could move out."

Gu Yun lightly wiped the corner of his lips: "Wait a moment, wait for their main ship to release the killing move."

The Black Eagle responded hurriedly, then turned around and roared away.

The two exchanged glances at each other awkwardly. Chang Geng's heartbeat still had not calmed down. He had no choice but to let out a bitter smile.

He half-supported and half-held Gu Yun to place him on the bed, pulled the blanket and covered him. He took a small piece of cloth material that Gu Yun sent him from his arm along with a needle and thread from his pouch. The color of the thread matched with the blue cloth, it seemed he was well prepared before coming. He pulled Gu Yun's belt and turned it over carefully. As expected, one end of it was crudely removed, and the threads were ragged.

Chang Geng said helplessly, "Does Marshal walk around in this kind of rags every day?"

"No," Gu Yun narrowed his eyes and carefully read his lips. He said with a low laugh, "I happened to wear this one today. Our spirits are perhaps connected when I was dreaming, I knew that Your Majesty will come to sew the clothing for me personally today."

Chang Geng's hand moved, but before he looked up at Gu Yun's expression, a hand fell on his face, his fingers slid gently down his

jaw toward the root of his ear: "Did you suffer?"

Chang Geng blinked his eyes quickly. He felt that the pain just now was too intense, the dams in his eyes might break today. The man only said three words yet his tears almost poured out again: "Then, are you in pain?"

He thought that Gu Yun wouldn't answer, but after a moment of silence, Gu Yun said frankly, "It was so painful that I often can't sleep."

Chang Geng's hands trembled, the needle pricked his finger.

Gu Yun said again, "Still not as painful as seeing you cry. Don't cry anymore in the future, yifu can have a nightmare all his life."

Chang Geng: "..."

Since he was a child, he could not tell which words of his were the sincere words from the heart and which were used to coax him, so he had to take them all as sincere words, his whole body was softened by just a few words.

Gu Yun: "Most of the Bone of Impurity has gone away, hasn' it? Miss Chen has taken good care of you — there will be no accident in this battle. The enemy will move out into our ambush. Once they enter the ambush, there will be a large number of sea cuttle directed at their main ship. The main ship has a fatal weakness, that is, when it is in crisis, its maneuverability cannot keep up with it. When the pope is pushed to the extreme, it will... "

Before he finished speaking, he was interrupted by a roar that could shake mountains. Although Gu Yun couldn't hear it clearly, he felt the vibration of his bed. Gu Yun slowly smiled. He waited for a moment, the tremor subsided gradually. He continued: "He would move all the heavy guns hidden under the tortoiseshell of his main ship out and try to breakthrough. A large number of *Ziliujin* and ammunition are carried on the Western main ship. However, when facing the battle, they seldom show their true appearance. We have analyzed them from many angles for a long time. It is speculated that the first reason is that they cannot afford to be consumed, and the

second reason is that once the main ship is put into the battle, it is incapable of taking care of the attached sea Jiao warships immediately -- "

A Black Eagle fell down and presented the third battle report: "Marshal, there really is a problem with the Western main ship. General Shen has taken advantage of the chaos to encircle it. Just then, in the chaos, the Western naval forces lost their order and nearly half of them sank! Black Eagles are ready to pursue... "

Before he finished speaking, an almost deafening Eagle sound came across the sky. It was the sound of tens of thousands of aerial killers raising their wings in the wind.

Gu Yun turned to Chang Geng: "Your Majesty, do you want to have a look... at how our army recovers Jiangnan?"

When he made a detailed analysis of all these things, it seemed that he was no longer only a wounded man who could only lie on the bed, but the general who broke into the rebel army of *Wei Wang*, who fought against the bandits in the southwest, who brought peace to the northwest, and who laid out his formation to retake Jiangnan.

Chang Geng replied with a serious expression, "My general's words carry great weight, ever-victorious."

There was a Red Kite with a high level of defense in Liangjiang garrison. Chang Geng supported Gu Yun to move up to it. The Red Kite rose slowly from the marshal tent, one could see the whole battlefield when pointing the *Qian Li Yan* downwards — the blue sea with raising waves, the iron ships resembling dragons, crossing into the sea, everywhere was fire and smoke ——

After fighting for more than two hours, in the end, the Westerners could no longer sustain. The main ship with countless holes gathered the scattered warships and rushed to the direction of the Dong Ying Sea in a panic.

Three rows of Great Liang Navy chased after them like mad, determined not to let them escape, disregarding the rumor that 'Great Liang Navy cannot fight on the open sea'. Tailing them for an entire

night, they bravely broke into the sea area of Dong Ying.

Controlling the situation until this point, Gu Yun lifted his lips in a smile.

Dong Ying would be the Western Army's last grave.

As the Western troops retreated, they sent four signals of request for support to Dong Ying. All of them resembled rocks that sunk into the sea. After they were chased into the Dong Ying Sea by the Great Liang Navy, the Westerners were shocked to find a group of Dong Ying warships standing in front of them in ready — These were the ships they had brought over and given to Dong Ying!

The two sides quickly approached each other, the Westerners madly signaled to the point of almost dropping the flag into the water. The 'friendly army' did not react, only a hoarse and long trumpet order was sounded in response ——

The Dong Ying warship's muzzles were aimed at the ally who they had been strongly supporting in the past.

"*Boom*"——

A blood-red sunset on the sea seemed to be the period signaling the end of a turbulent era as the dust settled.

When the fireworks exploded at the far sea, Gu Yun smiled softly. He had been enduring to closely follow this journey. At this time, his body could no longer hold on, he was so exhausted that he could fall asleep as soon as his head touches a pillow.

But Chang Geng suddenly leaned down, pulled his chin towards him and asked, "You said before that you have a personal wish that could not be written down in your last letter, and that you will tell me next time. What is it?"

Gu Yun laughed.

"What is it?" Chang Geng pressed on.

Gu Yun pulled him closer, placed his lips next to his ear, and

whispered: "Give you...all of my life until the end."

Chang Geng took a sharp inhale of breath, slowly calming down after a long moment: "It is you who said this, the general's words carry great weight...

Gu Yun continued his words: "Ever-victorious."

In the 10th year of Long An, on the fourth day of March, from the time of mutual exploration and decisive battle to when the Dong Ying turned sides at the last moment, the Western Navy, which had been occupying the entire Eastern Sea for several years, was defeated.

Gu Yun completed his mission and was 'forced' by the new emperor to return to the capital for recuperation.

Sixteen days later, the railway line was officially connected, and the great lifeline running through the north and south was completed. A large number of steel armors, fire engines, and *Ziliujin*, were able to be transported to the south at the fastest time. The Liangjiang garrison quickly established a naval base. The army was dispatched by Shen Yi, sweeping the Westerners' garrison occupying half the nation in the south.

Without strong naval forces and domestic support, the Western garrison resembled leaves to be swept away by the autumn wind. The fragile frontline collapsed for thousands of miles.

The battle on land lasted only two months. At the beginning of May that year, the Western allied forces formally surrendered and a large number of captives were detained in Great Liang, including the pope himself.

To preserve their dignity, the Holy Land was forced to send

people to negotiate. It ended with a compensation agreement: one side released the people, one side handed over the payment.

At this point, the dark cloud that loomed over the southern half of the nation was lifted. Year after year, there would come a day when Jiangnan will bask in the scent of osmanthus fragrance.

It was said that the pope died on his way back to his home country. No one knew whether he died naturally or was assassinated — but it no longer mattered.

Li Min, the former Yan Qin Wang, formally ascended the throne and was to be changed to Tai Shi* the next year.

**Ancient times refer to the era when the world was opened up and everything began to form.*

At the beginning of his ascension to the throne, the new emperor immediately granted a decree that the children of the former emperor would not have to move out of the palace, nor would there be a change to the previously established crown prince, nor would he retract military power.

The Black Tiger Emblem would still be in the hands of Gu Yun, guarding the capital alongside him and could mobilize the power of the four regions at any time.

At the same time, the three factions of the former Black Iron Camp were scattered and incorporated into garrisons everywhere, a generation of brave generals who grew up in the smoke took over the instructions of the people who walked before them, standing tall guarding the four sides.

In the eighteen years of his reign, Emperor Tai Shi always regarded himself as the 'acting emperor' and issued a series of constitution starting from the 'acting emperor' himself down to all the officials of civil and military, a set of system to limit power and responsibility, everyone was to be treated equally, the goal was for each person to reflect on themselves at all times.

A vigorous reform pushed thousands of years of depression and thick fog casting over the nation away.

The end of one era was always the starting point of another.

The author has something to say:

The end of the main story.

Thank you for your support.

Extra: The man behind the new trend of the capital

First posted on Lofter, May 17, 2018.

Note that extras translated will not be in the order by which they were posted by pi.

In the tenth year of Long An, without waiting for his formal ascension to the throne, the new emperor personally saw to the battlefields of Liangjiang. Afterward, the Dong Ying turned their spear to their own ally, Jiangnan achieved great victory.

At this time, the overall situation had been determined. Even if the pope had extraordinary abilities, he could no longer turn things around.

Thus, Gu Yun finally hung his seal.

In fact, when he was in Liangjiang camp, Gu Yun thought he was still very healthy - He did not break his arm or leg, his complexion was not pale, he was still as handsome as ever. Although his entire body was fixed with steel plates, he had been accompanied by 'brother steel plates' for many years, they have long been 'as close as one's own arms and legs'. After the defeat of the Western army, he thought that between his condition and being able to ride out on the battlefield was only a short distance.

After handing over all tasks to Shen Yi, Gu Yun finally unloaded the steel armor in his mind and fell asleep in the marshal tent. Living his life in a state of ready from morning until night for many years, this sleep was truly a good one. There was no dream, it was as if he could sleep to death.

In a haze, he first detected a faint voice, but he could not hear it clearly. Then someone placed a hand on his face, the fingers were cool, there was the familiar tranquilizer fragrance coming from the sleeve.

"Chang Geng." As he thought so, the tensed strings of consciousness loosened immediately, his mind began to sink again.

"Three days." Chang Geng raised his head, but his complexion was not very good, his lips were dried, he appeared even more tired than when flying to Liangjiang battlefield without resting. He asked Miss Chen in a very quiet voice, "How come he still hasn't woken up yet?"

Chen Qing Xu handed him a bowl of water. Chang Geng took it, but he only tasted it to test the temperature, then used a small spoon and carefully fed it to Gu Yun.

"The Marquis's medicine has sleeping aid ingredients, but it's probably not all about the strength of the medicine. In recent years, he has been too exhausted. Once his mind is relaxed, all his tiredness will be unleashed with it." Miss Chen said, "And Your Majesty's body also carries the scent of tranquilizer..."

Chang Geng had the tranquilizer with him years round, his body had soon soaked with the scent. Hearing this, he immediately took off the sachet of tranquilizer and left it aside. He asked anxiously, "It has something to do with the tranquilizer? By the way, I have been meaning to ask you this long time, he seems to be very sensitive to Miss Chen's tranquilizer. He would sleep heavily after inhaling only a little bit. This medicine should be very mild, logically, there should be no reaction, or was it because..."

Because his condition was already very bad?

Chen Qing Xu said, "Your Majesty, it's not a bad thing to sleep heavily."

"I know, just..."

"In fact, people like the Marquis, who grew up soaking in medicine, are less sensitive than ordinary people. I've heard that some years ago, the Marquis was attacked by assassins in the hot spring villa in the northern suburb. The assassins gave him the type of drug enough to take down two or three strong men, but he was just paralyzed for a moment." Chen Qing Xu said in a slow voice, "Your Majesty, this is still the case with a strong drug, let alone a package of tranquilizing

powder? The kind of medicine that can make him sleep deeply without waking up, was probably... "

Probably what?

Chang Geng looked at her in confusion.

Chen Qing Xu was someone from the pugilist world, but she was still a lady that had not married yet, she felt it was not convenient for her to say the latter part, thus she smiled with a bit of embarrassment, paid courtesy to him and turned away to leave.

At the beginning, Chang Geng did not understand what she was embarrassed about. He bowed his head and continued to feed Gu Yun the water. Suddenly, an idea flashed across his heart and halted Chang Geng's hand--

It's not the medicine itself that can make him sleep deeply, then is it the scent?

It is because of the person carrying the scent... It is because of me?

Chang Geng was in a daze for a long time, then put down the water bowl lightly. He felt that there was a small pool of water in his heart, with small waves continuing to roll back and forth. He couldn't help but pick up Gu Yun's hands and gently caressed the callous on the man's fingertips. He sighed and intertwined his fingers with the other's, not wanting to let go...

At this time, the whole space vibrated, followed by a loud echoing noise, as if a giant animal had sighed.

The muffled rumbling sound was so loud, causing even Gu Yun, a half deaf, to wake up. His mind was still not removed from the battlefield, his body had not fully awakened yet his heart was shocked first.

Gu Yun suddenly opened his eyes, the dazzling white light caused them to ache. He subconsciously pulled Chang Geng into his arms by instinct then searched around for his Wind Slasher at the head of the bed - but his hand only found an empty space.

Where is my Wind Slasher?

My armor?

Even if the liuli glass was not there, he could realize that this place did not seem to be the marshal tent of Liangjiang camp. It was void of the scent of cold iron and sweat brought by the generals moving in and out of the tent. There seemed to be an incense burner at the head of the bed, emitting a faint fragrance. The mattress under the body was so soft it could melt human bones, and outside the window...

A vast of white?

In the middle of spring in March, there is snow in Jiangnan?

Or had he become more blind?

At this time, the man who was protected by him gently turned his face, kissed him at the corner of his eye, and placed the liuli glass on the bridge of his nose.

Gu Yun's field of vision became clear. Then, with the buzzing noise, the room shook again. The white fog like a sea of clouds rose outside the window. It surged heavily for a moment, then slowly spread out, revealing the early spring scenery in the north.

On both sides there are two lines of iron puppets and guards, the first one seemed to be the leader of the Imperial Army.

Chang Geng: "The capital is here, Zi Xi, we are home."

Gu Yun clearly remembered that he was in the marshal tent of Liangjiang camp. How come he only closed his eyes for a moment, when he next opened them, he had already arrived at the capital?

He was confused, showing the most confused expression in his life: "Ah?"

Half a month later, the steam rail car running through the north and

south was officially put into use.

According to historical records, the earliest steam train burned Ziliujin, thus they were only for military use. Several years after the war, Ling Shu Institute had rebuilt it again and again, reducing energy consumption, and finally began to open the lines for civilian use.

But the history books did not write that the first train trip of Great Liang was used to secretly steal away Marshal to the capital.

Alas, history books always missed the important point.

Later, though Chang Geng was rid of the Bone of Impurity completely, he always prepared several packages of tranquilizer powder. People in and out of the imperial court followed the emperor's step in health care practices. 'Cherishing life' also became a new trend in the court. In their down time, people would sit together and exchange ideas on how to 'replenish qi, nourish blood' and 'calm the mind'. Medicinal diet became an independent cuisine and was very popular in the imperial capital during this era.

Miss Chen once accompanied General Shen back to the capital to see Chang Geng, and sensed the faint herbal scent still lingering around the emperor. Over the years, she had forgotten the talk on the steam rail car. She expressed towards the emperor in confusion, *the Bone of Impurity had really been eradicated, Your Majesty no longer have to be so careful any more*. It was a bit embarrassing for her.

Chang Geng laughed but did not speak.

Gu Yun no longer stationed in the border areas in his middle-age, except for routine inspection of military affairs in the four borders, he spent most of his time in the capital. After all, life in the capital was easy, there was also someone to take good care of him in his own house. After a long time, it had also given birth to a few mundane problems, such as how once in a while, when he got to a strange new place, he would be unable to sleep for a night or two.

However, as long as a pack of tranquilizer was placed at the head of the bed, he would sleep deeply regardless of what place it was.

Extra: First encounter

First posted on Lofter, April 26, 2018
*Priest posted it without title, the title here is Emi's own ^^*

"*Fuu*—" Shen Yi ran over breathlessly, "Zi Xi! Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun held the *Qian Li Yan*, making an "Mm" sound in response without turning his head. His eyes still did not leave the Barbarian scouts who just quietly left: "More than ten carts of *Ziliujin*, the wheel imprint on the ground is one palm deep. Good! Very good for a field officer of eight counties of the North. Such great appetite and courage!"

In the 27th year of Yuan He, Gu Yun received a classified order to come to the Northern Frontier to look for the whereabouts of the Fourth Prince who was lost among the common folks.

The Fourth Prince's birth mother was a Barbarian; Gu Yun's ears and eyes that have been damaged since he was a child was a gift bestowed by the Barbarians' poison. No one dared to touch his inverted scale, but His Majesty that grand old man dared to do so.

The meaning of Emperor Yuan he was very clear - the little prince had been lost among the commoners for many years, meeting sudden changes, he must be confused and uneasy, thus he would ask Gu Yun to escort him along the way to form a good bond, to leave the resentment of the previous generation behind.

The old emperor pressed his head forcing him to ‘form a good bond’, it was not convenient for Gu Yun to resist the decree either, thus he started carrying out a lazy and half-hearted job, ordered people to ‘inquire and search’ just for the sake of it. If it weren't for him taking notice of the strange movements of the Barbarians, he would still be in charge of the Western Regions by now. Just a little prince who couldn't distinguish round from flat absolutely could not force him to transfer to this place.

"Ji Ping, you are here just in time," Gu Yun, who was not even

twenty at that time, chuckled a little bit and threw the Qian Li Yan to Shen Yi. "You go back tomorrow and transfer a team of Black Eagle from the Black Iron Camp here."

**Yifu is 19 years old here.*

Hot sweat broke out on Shen Yi's forehead: "Let's not talk about this, the little prince..."

Gu Yun was still in his youthful and frivolous age, a group of generals in the north who didn't listen to his deployment were all considered to have offended him. His head was always filled with thoughts about how to display his might and to punish these people, "No need to capture this traitor of a field officer of the North in a hurry. Let's stay here for a while and let the Barbarians shed more blood. I want to see how much pests could their 'Gold Erosion' plan be able to dig out. We can haul in this net when the time is right, then confiscate the load of Ziliujin."

Shen Yi strode to catch up with him and tried to interject: "The little prince ..."

"Ah, just say we haven't found him yet!" Gu Yun lied without blinking, "Let that golden branch and jade leaves grow in this field for a while longer. Either way, he is already this big, it's not a big deal to wait another year, no need to be so impatient. Without him, what excuse do I have to run to the north all the time? After I received the confidential order, there is no end to the broken mouths of those in the imperial platform. "

Shen Yi couldn't bear it anymore, he broke the rules and pulled Gu Yun's shoulder.

Gu Yun: "What are you doing?"

Shen Yi: "The little prince is gone!"

Gu Yun impatiently raised his long eyebrows: "Gone? Then you send someone to look for him. What are you complaining to me for?"

Shen Yi: "The Black Eagle heard that it seems that the child has run to the outside of the pass by himself!"

"Tch," Gu Yun looked back at the dark skyline in the distance. The cruel environment of the Northern Frontier was about to welcome a heavy snowstorm. He frowned, "How troublesome, please don't get eaten by the wolves."

Shen Yi was frightened of his crow mouth: "Ancestor, can't you say anything nice!"

"Go, let's go have a look."

The snow quickly started falling. In an instant, heaven and earth were a vast expanse of white. The thick fur coat could not resist the bone piercing cold wind. Gu Yun widened his eyes, blinked away the snow on his eyelashes, and took a sip of liquor to warm himself up. He thought furiously, "Little brat, do you want to find death?"

"Marshal," a Black Eagle landed from the snowstorm, "There are wolves domesticated by Barbarians four miles away in the northwest. I only dare to fly a bit further thanks to the snow, for fear of being discovered by them, I did not dare to approach."

"Raising wolves?" Shen Yi was shocked and turned to Gu Yun. "Only the nobles of the Northern Barbarians can raise wolves. Those nobles of the Barbarians wish they could stay far away from our Great Liang border. How could they let out their wolves here?"

"Well, I've heard a rumor." Gu Yun said thoughtfully, "The prince of the Man, the one named Jia Lai Ying Huo, seems to have an affair with their goddess. I don't know if it's true."

"... His Highness is the son of the goddess and the emperor." Shen Yi's face changed. "If Jia Lais Ying Huo knew that His Highness had left Hu Ge Er's sight, would he..."

"Ouch," Gu Yun who's one to not avoid seeing the fun said with great emotion, "Alas, blue waves for thousands of miles, the beginning of spring fills up the skies.*"

**yifu made up this romantic nonsense*

Shen Yi said: "Marshal, can you say something sensible!"

"There must be owners near the wolves. Don't gather here in one place, they will notice. I'll go and have a look." After he finished speaking, Gu Yun ushered his horse and swiftly rushed out.

The snowstorm was getting heavier and heavier, splashing into the seven orifices of the person charging forward, making one's windpipe ache. Gu Yun and Shen Yi whipped up their horses, not long after, they could hear the solemn howling of wolves intertwined with the wind.

Shen Yi shuddered for a moment, and said to himself, *"A little boy of only eleven or twelve years old. If he really falls into the wolf pack, ..."*

Would he be able to survive?

But it is the prince!

He couldn't help but glance at Gu Yun, who was wrapped in a snow-white fur and a snow-white cloak. Even the horse was white. With just one brief moment of startling, both his body and horse seemed to have melted into the snow.

The horse went fast but was not imbalanced. For a moment, Shen Yi suddenly realized that after the Black Iron Camp incident twelve years ago, the little problem child of the Marquis's Manor fell out of the luxurious brocade overnight. How could he have no grudge against the son of the Barbarian woman? Maybe he would come here to have a look, just to half-heartedly enact the emperor's decree. Maybe Gu Yun did not care if the prince was dead or alive at all.

If the child was unlucky and died here, in front of the emperor, Gu Yun only needed to find an excuse.

After all, the emperor was old. The young generation of eagles and wolves couldn't wait to show their claws and teeth made of black iron. They plan to set off a bloodbath in the northwest. How could a young boy who has no mother family and no relatives outside rely on his father's distant and empty love even if he was of the royal blood?

Just then, the shrill howl of the wolf echoed in his ear, Shen Yi's senses came back to him.

Gu Yun: "Ji Ping!"

A few male wolves with shiny fur warned the approaching intruders at a high altitude, then sprang forward to engage in battle. Although they were dressed in civilian clothes, their horses were war steed. They were not afraid of wolves. With a long neigh, they raised their front hooves and kicked out.

With the Barbarians nearby, Shen Yi could not reveal his Wind Slasher. He bent down and pulled on a pair of iron horse pedals, the sound of metal colliding was heard for several miles in the open and empty field outside the pass, the bloodthirsty wolves bowed their backs in fear.

Shen Yi lowered his voice and asked, "Zi Xi, kill them?"

"What are you saying? We are just two weak scholars passing by." Gu Yun squeezed out a few words from the corner of his mouth, then quickly raised the volume of his voice.

"Don't be afraid, big brother. Don't we have powder to drive off the wolf? Hold on a little longer, I'll find someone to help!"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu, Zi, Xi!

How could this man play the role of a little white face that runs off in the face of danger so well? As if he had practiced it a thousand times!

The wind outside the gate could change direction at any time. With the advantage on their side, Shen Yi did not fight with that surname Gu. He raised his hand and threw a medicine bag into the air, splitting it with a horsewhip. The roaring wind rolled out the pungent powder, splashing them onto the wolves.

The wolves whimpered and retreated, but the Barbarians who were hiding in the dark probably saw that there were two shit-stirring sticks here, what they wanted to do today might not be possible. A distant wolf whistle sounded, the wolves retreated with their tails between them, leaving a mess in the ground and a tiny

figure.

Shen Yi's heart tightened. Before he could see clearly, a breeze passed by. Gu Yun had already urged the horse to move towards it.

"How is it?"

"Still breathing." Gu Yun reached out to him, "Bring the wine bottle."

Shen Yi looked closer and saw that it was a boy of eleven or twelve years old, thin and bare-boned, being held in Gu Yun's arms, he was only a small lump. The boy's body was covered in blood. One hand was hanging softly, it seemed that the bone was broken. The other hand was still clutching a knife.

Gu Yun gently clasped his hand holding the knife. The boy's mind awakened instantly. His dark eyes stared straight into the young general's, like a pair of flints holding flames, would not extinguish even on the verge of death.

Gu Yun was stunned.

"Wine!"

Shen Yi threw him the wine bottle. Gu Yun returned to his senses, caught it and placed it at the boy's mouth: "Open your mouth."

There was no telling if the boy understood. When Gu Yun poured the wine into his mouth, he did not refuse and swallowed it obediently.

Shen Yi quickly checked his injury: "Fortunately, a wolf claw scratched his back, and his leg was bitten, but they are not severe. The rest may have been caused by falling down while running. Why is there so much blood?"

Gu Yun: "It's wolf blood."

"Ah?"

Gu Yun didn't say a word. He wrapped the boy in his cloak and

said, "Let's go. To Yanhui."

As Gu Yun finished, he heard a soft sound. The boy's hand loosened, and the knife covered with wolf blood fell to the ground. He struggled for a bit, then reaching out a hesitant hand and held onto Gu Yun's clothes.

"*So trusting of me? But you don't know me*." Gu Yun's heart suddenly moved. He looked down at the strange boy and thought, "*So light*."

As he thought so, his strength involuntarily lightened, as if he was afraid of crushing the tiny bones and flesh in his arms.

Many years later, Uncle Wang was sorting out the old things in the Marquis's Manor and pulled out a pair of leather wristbands from the bottom of the box. The workmanship was very rough, like those worn by the countryside hunters. One could tell at first sight that it was not something from the manor. Uncle Wang didn't dare to throw it away, waiting until Gu Yun was free to bring it to him to ask.

"This thing," Gu Yun smiled at first glance. "It was a gift to me from a country boy who was biting at the wolf. The wolf died horribly. A good piece of wolf skin was cut by him as if it had been bitten by a dog. At last, there was only a little bit left that could be of use, enough to make into a pair of wrist guards - Ah, what are you doing?"

Chang Geng happened to pass by. He could tell at a glance who created this object with eye-aching craftsmanship. He tried to grab it with his hand, but Gu Yun dodged it lightly.

"Why are you keeping this kind of rags," said Chang Geng. "Throw them away quickly. This year's autumn hunting, I will make you a better one with a complete piece of skin."

"That's good." Gu Yun said, hugging the leather wristband in his arms, "That will be from the big beauty. This one was from the little beauty."

Chang Geng: "..."

"The little beauty was quite shy, even stuttering when giving me this gift." Gu Yun's improper fingers lifted the emperor's chin, pretending to dislike him. "Unlike this one, who is in charge of heaven and earth, but has an even thicker skin than a wolf."

Chang Geng hissed and went to catch his hand, but as he was unable to, he jumped on to his body: "It's not as thick as yours, give me! Clearly, I have given that to Teacher Shen that year…"

Gu Yun: "Given to who? You say it again. "

Uncle Wang laughed and retreated, no longer disturbing the two masters playing with each other.

"Your Majesty, when you were holding onto that knife, you would rather die than let go. How come you threw it away as soon as you saw me?"

"Maybe it's because Marshal is a little more handsome than the wolf."

"Are you itching for a beating?"

"A lot more handsome —— *a lot*, alright?"

Or perhaps,

My general, some people are predestined by fate. With only one glance, you will never be able to escape.

Extra: Souls returned home

Extra 1 in JJWXC

In his dream, Chang Geng remembered things of many years ago. There was a pungent odor of burning oil, salty blood, and earthy scent of hay surrounding him. He dreamed that he had become a small lump of flesh, curled up in a shabby basket, bumping along with the step of a woman's unbalanced footing.

Hu Ge Er had long hair like a dark cloud, but her body was too thin, making her head seem oversized, appearing like a person who was piled up on a rack of bones. She went through the mountain bandit's nest like a mass grave by herself, singing a song of the Barbarians.

All of a sudden, she turned around and looked at Chang Geng. Chang Geng instinctively recoiled. Even though he had already grown up and was indestructible, this thin and frail woman could always hurt him. He had a deep fear of her, much like in the past.

However, she only looked at him silently for a while and did not do anything. Her face was stained with blood, her lips were pale, and her expression was dazed. Her entire spirit was concentrated in those eyes, like a pair of reefs hiding great waves.

Hu Ge Er sighed softly, her appearance at this time did not seem to be of an insane person. She stretched out her thin hand and caressed Chang Geng's head. Her lips changed to another tune. People from all over the world, from the north to the south, did not understand the language of one another; however, the songs that mothers hummed to coax their children to sleep were all similar. Chang Geng was a little surprised. He never knew that there was another scene such as this in his memory.

She carried him through a long and endless road of death, then stopped at the foot of a mountain. Behind the mountain, there was a big fire quietly burning. The smoke rose up to the sky, souls sank to the ground. She wiped a handful of sweat on her forehead, sat on the side of the road to rest, and carried little Chang Geng out of the

basket on her back.

Chang Geng subconsciously struggled, Hu Ge Er raised him to her eye level, staring at his face. There was no telling what she was looking at. Suddenly, there was a little sorrow and tenderness on her face. She put little Chang Geng on her knee, and gently traced his little features with her fingers. Then, she leaned down and kissed him on his forehead.

Chang Geng didn't dare to blink. He saw the eyelashes of the Barbarian woman thick like butterfly wings trembled slightly, as if ready to fly up at any time. She suddenly wept without warning, and whispered, "Child, why were you born here? Is it God who sent you to suffer? "

Chang Geng looked at her through years of memories. When she placed her thin and bony hands on his neck, his heart suddenly became calm, and somehow he was not afraid of this woman.

When she tried to strangle him while in tears, her bloody hands were fierce, but her eyes were tender.

But when she exhausted her tears and came back to her senses, she released her hand from Chang Geng's neck and even breathed air into his dying throat, her eyes returned to cold and cruel.

Every time she dried her tears, she seemed to evaporate a part of her soul from her body, becoming more and more indifferent, her life with little Chang Geng also became more and more peaceful.

Chang Geng followed her, wandering, some days here, some days there.

Until one day, she suddenly saw Chang Geng's foot. Her expression was shocked, she covered her face with both hands and stepped back a few steps. Under the helpless eyes of the little boy, she collapsed into herself, crying bitterly. Chang Geng in the dream looked down at his own feet, and he found that his toe was miraculously self-repairing.

What was 'self-repairing'?

Chang Geng tried to recall for a moment, the vivid dream suddenly brought him something that had been buried deep in his memories.

He thought of something that happened when he was very young — at an age where he should not have any memory of. At that time, there really was a congenital defect in his toe. Later, it suddenly regrew normally, he did not know when.

'Wu Er Gu' would gradually reflect the characteristics of his devoured brother.

The healing toe had given Hu Ge Er a devastating blow, it seemed to remind her every second that she had made her own child into a Bone of Impurity, and the characteristics of that child began to reflect in this little 'evil god' that was merged from two to become one — much like what people had said.

Chang Geng looked at her with sympathy. When he watched all of this from the perspective of an outsider, he suddenly understood the feelings of the insane woman.

When a person was full of the humiliation of one's nation and hatred, it was easy to make extreme decisions — such as killing themselves, even as far as killing their own children — but after all, these can be done only by a quick blade, even if blood pours, there would come a day when things would change in the flow of time, yet she had insisted on choosing a path of self-torment, long and endless.

Suddenly, Hu Ge Er rushed over, grabbed his foot, raised a stone, and smashed down.

The pain was very clear, very real — even in a dream.

"You are not my child, you are not my child..." she repeatedly said, bending his toes fiercely.

Chang Geng gave a groan of pain, stuck between dream and reality, his whole foot hurt almost to the point of numbing.

At this time, a cold but powerful hand suddenly grasped his foot, caressing and relieving the burning pain. Chang Geng gasped for a

few breaths. Someone whispered in his ear, "Shh, it's alright. It's all in the past, I am here, everything has passed."

Chang Geng looked up at a loss. Suddenly the scene around him changed greatly. His body gradually grew, becoming taller — however, his clothes were still ragged and his body was full of injuries. The boundless cold seemed to soak into his bones.

In the forlorn and endless field outside the pass, he narrowed his eyes and saw a man coming against the light, his cloak flying in the wind, his footing steady. There was an old black iron wine bottle hanging at his waist.

The man's hands were as steady as iron, but his facial features resemble a painting. He held out a hand to him and asked, "Follow me?"

Chang Geng looked at him. His body and mind were almost empty by exhaustion, he momentarily could not speak.

"Come with me, there's no need to return again in the future."

Chang Geng grabbed the hand and let the other lead him forward. He felt that he was growing higher, becoming stronger, as if he could walk across mountains and rivers with just one step.

He suddenly turned around and saw that the bitter cold scenery of the outside of the pass and the wolves were gradually left behind. In her yellow dress worn before her death, her hair done up in the style of an unmarried woman, Hu Ge Er silently watched him.

And beside her, no one knew when, there was another person. At first, he was a little boy, then, as Chang Geng grew up, he also became a teenager, then a young man, step by step.

His facial features were almost identical to Chang Geng's, standing side by side with Hu Ge Er.

Suddenly, Hu Ge Er turned her face, pulled down his head, stood on tiptoe and kissed the young man beside her on the forehead.

Together, they watched Chang Geng walk further away.

Chang Geng suddenly opened his eyes. The sky was already bright. He suddenly had a very different feeling. It seemed as if a pair of shackles that had been tied to him all his life were suddenly gone. His body was so light that he was almost unaccustomed to it.

There was the scent of tranquilizer around him. As soon as Chang Geng raised his eyes, he saw Chen Qing Xu sitting silently on one side, with a book in her hands. Seeing that he had awakened, Chen Qing Xu gently raised a finger. Chang Geng hurriedly turned his head along her line of sight and saw that Gu Yun had fallen asleep on the side, with one hand still resting on his shoulder.

Chang Geng felt his heart thud, many emotions surged in him.

Chen Qing Xu was very understanding. She rolled up her book, after burning the tranquilizer, she lifted her robe to pay courtesy then quietly retreated from the room.

In the silence, he could hear the sound of the other person's shallow but peaceful breathing. Chang Geng took the hand on his shoulder very gently, clasped it in his own, ten fingers intertwined. Chang Geng silently watched Gu Yun for a moment, held his breath, climbed up, and slowly took off the liuli glass on Gu Yun's face.

Then carefully touched Gu Yun's lips.

Unfortunately, the light kiss could not startle Gu Yun awake. Chang Geng reluctantly increased his strength a little, gently licked open Gu Yun's lip. Hearing that his breathing rate finally changed, he dragged Gu Yun's whole body closer, embracing him in his arms, wanting to help him into a more comfortable position.

Gu Yun didn't open his eyes, but he patted his back by habit and coaxed him vaguely: "Sleep, I'm here."

Chang Geng closed his eyes slightly and buried his head contentedly in his neck.

The nightmare was over.

Then the war ended.

On the day when the Western Army sent the letter of surrender to the capital, Shen Yi sent an urgent message to ask Gu Yun how to escort them into the city.

Gu Yun replied briefly, "Giant Kite."

Eleven years ago, Jia Lai Ying Huo used a Giant Kite to sneak into Yanhui Town of the Northern Frontier, casting a dark shadow over Great Liang. That shadow was also the starting point of the Son of Heaven's journey from a small town to the capital thousands of miles away. Now, the smoke of war was gone, the wind and rain were beginning to stop as if they were about to come to a conclusion.

Unlike Yanhui Town, the capital city had no function ready to welcome the Giant Kite. The Northern Camp had to take charge of defense, opening up a path on the moat outside the nine gates. The place for people to watch in the inner city was covered with small iron fences to prevent too many people from the crowd from pushing someone into the water.

The new emperor led the civil and military officials to meet them outside the city. Waiting until evening, a whole row of Giant Kites came from the south like birds returning to their nests.

Tens of thousands of fire wings rotated in the dusk. The setting sun plated a layer of flowing gold on the Giant Kites through the

steam. The roar came from several miles away. They landed into the moat, like the sun setting, in an orderly manner, melted the gold into the water, and made a detour around the city.

All the generals on the Giant Kite lined up on the deck, their hail of 'Long live the emperor!' raised as high as mountains.

The people watching all around placed thousands of lanterns into the water, drifting along for thousands of miles, small spots of fire faintly flickered, carrying souls back to their home.

Extra: A dead man's feelings

Extra 2 from JJWXC

After his return to the capital, Gu Yun did not go out for half a year. He was alright at first, but there was a period when his condition was very poor, he could not even afford to sit or stand for a long time. A bowl of medicine went down, and almost a day passed. However, as winter approached, his health gradually improved, Gu Yun was starting to feel a little 'overwhelmed'.

At times when he was busy, every day, he only wished to plunge into the warm countryside, lying all day long without getting up, resting until his bone and flesh rot. Finally able to live the life he always dreamed of after much difficulty, yet he was getting sick...of having too much free time.

With nothing to do all day long, he busied himself from morning until night with the bastard bird, finding ways to torment each other. The bird was weathered and thin, wishing it could disappear from this world.

Perhaps some people were born to sleep in a hard bed, their entire body made up of bones, lying too long in a luxurious brocade would cause them back pain instead.

Finally, even the emperor could not bear to watch anymore. When it was near the winter solstice, Gu Yun was released back to the court.

That day, coincidentally, it was Gu Yun's day off. A few days prior, he was already a bit dejected, unable to get up from the early morning and unable to sleep well at night. Although he was quite careful at concealing himself and did not toss and turn, Chang Geng knew he wasn't asleep. In order not to disturb him, Gu Yun would unconsciously keep his breath low and long. Sometimes, he could hardly hear him.

He did not answer even when Chang Geng asked. If he was being pressed too much, he began to talk nonsense. Either way, with that Gu's ability of a flexible tongue, what he did not want to say, one could never find out even if they pry with an awl.

In addition to the new year's festival, the important officials above third grade took turns to rest every day in case of an accident happened, there would not be anyone available to overtake their duty. In other words, although Gu Yun's rest was today, it didn't mean that His Majesty, the emperor, who secretly snuck out of the palace and stayed overnight at the Marquis's Manor, could also rest. At the beginning of the new government, Chang Geng had a mountain of things to attend to, he still had to get up early in the morning to rush back to work.

Then he found that Gu Yun was also dressed to go out.

"Wear more clothes on such a cold day," Chang Geng asked casually. "By the way, where are you going?"

Gu Yun seriously told a fib: "Going for a horse ride in the suburbs."

Chang Geng looked up at the howling northwest wind outside, then at Gu Yun's face that belonged to someone who had just recovered from serious injury, with no trace of blood, and frowned: "What?"

Gu Yun glanced elsewhere, at the sky, at the ground, anywhere but Chang Geng, and refused to talk.

Chang Geng had no time to linger around the manor and interrogate a certain someone, he could only quickly signal Huo Dan with his eyes before his leave. Ever since he witnessed his Marquis being severely ill, being carried back home personally by His Majesty, Huo Dan was determined to go on the path of being a secret spy, eating from one but protecting another.

Gu Yun's ears and eyes were still not sharp. For a moment, he didn't realize that a traitor had risen from his own backyard. After Chang Geng left, he put on his coat stealthily, told his servants to

prepare a very low-profile carriage. He only took Huo Dan with him, the extra guards were all left at home.

Huo Dan: "Marquis, sir, where are we going."

Gu Yun mumbled something.

Huo Dan: "Marquis, sir, do you have a toothache?"

Gu Yun: "..."

It was rare for Huo Dan to see his 'hard to express by words' face. He thought to himself, "*Is he going to look for flowers and willows* behind His Majesty's back*?"

**visit brothels*

However, looking at Gu Yun's 'there is nothing left in this life' expression, it did not seem like he was about to go out to find pleasure.

They stared at one another for a long time. The cool wind passed through the curtain and blew out the heater. Gu Yun finally squeezed three words out of his teeth: "Hu Guo Temple."

Huo Dan: "..."

He thought in shock, "*My Marquis must have taken the wrong medicine in the morning!"*

Gu Yun angrily pulled down the curtain of the carriage: "What are you looking at? Still not going!"

When Marshal Gu was in the Northern Frontier, he had secretly made a wish: if Chang Geng's Bone of Impurity truly was cured, he would go lit incense for Hu Guo Temple. But he never was able to fulfill it.

At the time of making the wish, this ungrateful man might have had some sort of respect. But as time passed, he had thrown away the favor and forgotten Buddha.

In these recent nights, Gu Yun had some strange dreams. He saw a row of bald monks chanting sutras to him in an orderly way. Their heads were shiny and swaying in one direction, going Amitabha all night, he was still dizzy the next day when he got up. Continuing for three or four days, Gu Yun finally remembered his 'grand wish' and understood why the donkeys were here.

Taking advantage of the rest day, he reluctantly went to Hu Guo Temple to burn incense.

Taking advantage of the cold winter months, as it was not the new year occasion or festival days, there were few visitors in the mountain temple. Gu Yun hurriedly made an early morning departure and sneaked into Hu Guo Temple like a thief. At this time, the mountain fog had not dispersed. There was a layer of dew hanging on the stone steps, and the surrounding was quiet. Gu Yun did not have the heart to appreciate any of it. He walked with his head bowed, and his steps were fast, rushing as if he was going to be reborn.

Huo Dan was afraid that he would fall, he trotted all the way behind him in fear. They reached the end of the mountain road that took half an hour to pass in less than a moment. In the blink of an eye, they had reached the front of the incense hall's gate.

Huo Dan gasped a few breaths and asked gingerly, "Marquis, sir, what are we doing here?"

Gu Yun gnashed his teeth and said with an irritated expression: "Incense offering."

Huo Dan: "..."

Seeing how this gentleman was so aggressive, he had originally thought he was coming to collect debts or seek vengeance.

The morning classes of monks in the temple have begun. The sound of the morning bell and the arrangement of the sitting mats in the incense hall seemed to be in place. A monk in a white plain monk's robe was knocking a wooden fish in the main hall and chanting sutras in silence.

Gu Yun glanced around and saw that no one noticed him from far and near. He quickly sneaked into the incense hall, grabbed a handful of copper and silver coins, and threw them into the donation box. Then he picked up two incense sticks with disdain, shook his wrists and lit them, he stretched his arms, trying to keep the smoke away from him.

Gu Yun picked up the incense and glanced up at the Golden Buddha statue in front of him. He said to himself, "*Do I have to worship this thing?"*

Then he made a decision in a blink of an eye: "*Forget it."*

He didn't even have the proper posture of worship, only nodded his head to Buddha as if this was as far as he could go to display respect. He quickly inserted the incense in his hand into the censer, turned his head to Huo Dan and said, "It's done. Let's go."

Huo Dan: "..."

It was the first time in his long life did he see that someone worshipped Buddha with such arrogance. Their Marquis was not so much coming to worship Buddha as waiting for Buddha to come to worship him.

Just when Gu Yun had dealt with the incense quickly and was about to leave the hall, the monk who was hiding nearby knocking on the wooden fish suddenly stood up and turned around, smiling to Gu Yun and said, "How is the Marquis doing?"

Gu Yun: "..."

He made complete preparations to avoid people's eyes and ears. Unexpectedly, he had bumped into the stinky monk here in the incense hall. He must have forgotten to look at the golden calendar before going out.

Liao Ran smiled and gestured at him and asked, "Why did the Marquis come? It must not be for praying."

Gu Yun looked somewhat unnatural and said, "Repaying the wish."

Liao Ran said: "Since the Marquis is willing to come, why not be more sincere. It's too hasty to come and go like this."

Gu Yun cursed 'how unlucky' secretly, but smiled politely on the outside: "Since my heart is sincere enough, why must we cling to custom? Master, are you blinded by outward appearance? "

Liao Ran clasped his hands in front of his chest, bowed his head, and said frankly: "Marshal Gu naturally understood Buddha's teaching, truly an admiration for us monks. It is true — you can remember to come all the way to express your thanks, then you must have been very sincere the moment when you made the wish. As you came here today, of course, it was also to give your heart to our Buddha."

Gu Yun was at a loss for a reply, he had to look at him with a smile on the outside, but gritted his teeth on the inside.

Liao Ran: "The weather is cold. Why don't you come to the monk's meditation room and have a cup of tea?"

Gu Yun: "I dare not disturb you. Master, please continue with your day. Um… I've come all the way here, it could be said it was a trip. I'll take a walk around myself.

Liao Ran smiled at him again and again to pay courtesy, then floated out of the incense hall.

The eminent monk walked out the door about a hundred steps away, then suddenly picked up his monk's robe, and came back with small steps. He poked his head into the incense hall and saw Gu Yun the disrespectful bastard had indeed obediently walked in front of the mats, stared at them for a moment, then took the incense and lit it again. He held his nose and forced out a devout appearance, but even when looking at his back, one could still see his unwilling heart.

After appreciating Gu Yun's irritated back, the eminent monk momentarily felt extremely satisfied, only then did he raise his robe happily and walked away.

After Gu Yun went home, he washed himself with wormwood leaf water three times from head to toe, then called Huo Dan aside, threatening him with a pressing demeanor: "I know you like to run your mouth with Chang Geng in your free time, but for today's matter, if you dare leak a word with others, I will use military law to deal with you."

Huo Dan: "..."

Gu Yun took two steps and turned his head around abruptly. He was faced with the distorted expression of Huo Dan, who wanted to laugh but could not.

Huo Dan was frightened, he swallowed down his laughing fit. Without saying anything, he turned around and ran away.

Many years later, Chang Geng still did not know where Gu Yun went and what he did that day. It was evidence of how mighty Marshal Gu's authority could be.

No one knew if it was because Gu Yun only paid a sincere visit to Buddha once in his life. This time, Buddha had given him a large gift of buying one, getting another for free.

The next afternoon, Chen Qing Xu visited and brought a prescription.

"I have been looking for clues in the palace for a long time, but was not able to find anything," said Chen Qing Xu. "Instead, I found something useful in the book of the secret arts of the goddess, which can detoxify the poison that had been contracted for a long time. It's just that Marshal's ears and eyes have been damaged for many years. Even if detoxification is done, you can only wait for them to slowly recover in the future. I'm afraid... "

I'm afraid it's impossible to be cured completely.

Chen Qing Xu: "Would you like to try the treatment?"

Gu Yun glanced at Chang Geng, who wanted to say something

but decided against it, and took it without hesitation. It doesn't matter whether it works or not, if it could make Chang Geng feel at ease, he didn't care how much more medicine he had to drink.

At the moment the medicine entered his mouth, Gu Yun suddenly felt that he was a little familiar with the scent, but he momentarily couldn't remember where he had sensed it before. At that time, he had thought that since there were too many medicines he had taken in his life, it was inevitable that some might smell the same as the other, and did not put it to mind.

Instead, Chang Geng was very nervous. It took him two hours to look through a dozen reports, he would look up and ask him how he was feeling every other time.

It's all long-term diseases, how could he possibly feel with only one dose.

Gu Yun half-coaxed and half-lied to him: "Much better."

Chang Geng asked hurriedly: "Which part is much better, can you still see me when you take off the liuli glass?"

Gu Yun glanced at Chang Geng and said with a smile, "Can see everything without fail, every single strand of hair, even with a blindfold."

Chang Geng: "..."

Hearing that the man didn't speak sensible things again, Chang Geng threw the royal pen aside and planned to have a good 'talk' with him.

Gu Yun raised his leg with a smirk, then steadily and ruthlessly made the emperor take a 'leg swipe'. His leg technique was better than that of the older year. Chang Geng suddenly stumbled and fell towards him, the man even innocently opened his arms waiting for the fall.

Chang Geng himself was scared out of cold sweat, afraid that his fallen large body might squish him to death. He hurriedly stretched out his hand at the handle of the chair for support and angrily

shouted: "Gu Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun smiled, his lecherous hand quickly caressed Chang Geng's waist to his heart's content. Chang Geng's anger raised at his touch, but for fear that the other could not take it, he did not dare to engage in it and could only clasp his wrist with a grave expression and pressed it aside. Gu Yun didn't struggle either. He kissed Chang Geng's arm with his head on his side: "Oh, smells good."

Chang Geng could hardly speak: "You..."

Suddenly, Gu Yun's face changed, he broke his wrist away from Chang Geng's hold: "Wait."

Chang Geng hurriedly kept his balance: "What is it?"

When Gu Yun was 'molesting' His Majesty, he accidentally rubbed the old beads on his wrist at the tip of his nose. A very faint odor came out of the gap between the wooden beads. It was so light that only Gu Yun and his dog nose could detect it. He suddenly remembered why Chen Qing Xu's prescription smelled so familiar — the odor of the medicine was the same as the light fragrance overflowing from the beads on his wrist.

For many years, Gu Yun and this string of wooden beads have been separated then reunited. He didn't care much about this thing, but these little beads seemed to cling to him stubbornly. No matter what he experienced, it had always accompanied him.

Gu Yun took off the beads which were rarely separated from his body, tried to twist several beads, and finally as he got to the biggest one, under his finger's force, a shallow gap was exposed, a crisp sound was heard. In Gu Yun's hands, the bead was divided into two parts, revealing the inside world — a pill was hidden in it.

The two men could only look at each other. Chang Geng turned the whole palace upside down in order to find the clues of the antidote, but the real antidote had been hidden on Gu Yun's body. It had been with him through many things for more than eleven years, only until Chen Qing Xu found out the formula of the antidote by herself did it show a little clue.

Gu Yun suddenly couldn't help but laugh, holding the medicine pill in his fingers and joked, "How is this little thing's temperament exactly like Emperor Yuan He?"

Untimely cruel, untimely warm.

...Untimely poison, untimely antidote.

"This cousin...will be watching you."

Extra: Romance talk

Extra 3 from JJWXC

Compared with former Emperor Long An, Li Feng, Li Min's way of a ruler could be described as flexible. Although the reforms were like waves cascading one after another, everything that fell in his hands was carried out orderly — laws first, policies second, from large to small, from top to bottom. Building schools to develop people's wisdom, sending large dragons to escort merchant ships and scholars to study overseas. He even quietly stripped away the highly centralized monarchy of Emperor Wu's reign from the complicated court.

Li Min was dedicated to the country's affairs. At the same time, although he was not very ostentatious, he would also not treat himself as harshly as his brother.

Every year, when it's hot, he will lead all the officials to the newly built Jinghua Garden Palace for summer vacation. In the New Year, after a Palace Banquet would end early, no one would be able to hold him behind with government affairs — the emperor must go to the hot spring in the north for rest.

However, in the first year of Tai Shi, the ministers were still not used to the emperor's personal habits, so the hot spring was disturbed several times.

One of the most bothersome was Shen Yi.

On the fifth day of January, Shen Yi returned to the capital to report after successfully escorting back the war compensation fund. He reckoned that the two men should already be done being lovey-dovey at this time, it would not be too much of a nuisance to visit. Thus he went home to pick up some bottles of wine made by his father and went straight to the northern suburbs to meet Gu Yun.

Old Master Shen liked to mess around with this and that all year round. He once brewed too much wine without anyone to gift it to, the family servants had brought it to Wang Nan Tower for them to

sell on their behalf. Unexpectedly, two large carts of the homebrew wine were sold out in three days. Since then, Master Shen's home wine has become very popular for a while, even one drop was hard to find.

When the old man heard about this, he resolutely played hard to get and refused to brew in large quantities. Each time he only produced three or two bottles of wine and only sent them to his relatives and close friends. If he had nothing to do, he would ask people to write a story around the process of his home brewing in the tabloids. People could only look but not drink, truly despicable.

In the end, even the simple little wine jar of Shen family had become a new fashion in the capital, and Master Shen's homebrew wine became a valuable gift, perfect for the poor and old-school Shen Yi to bring out to ask for a favor.

Unfortunately, the famous wine was only in Gu Yun's hands for a while before it was ruthlessly confiscated by His Majesty. Chang Geng gently but determinedly carried away the wine bottle and said to him, "I'll ask someone to warm it up then give it to you."

There was no telling why Gu Yun seemed unhappy and angry, Shen Yi was confused. As soon as Chang Geng left, he prodded Gu Yun with his elbow: "The Emperor of a country takes care of you so well, what are you displaying that face for?"

Gu Yun gave him a stomach aching glance and waved his hand weakly: "What the hell do you know."

Shen Yi wanted to retort, but when the words came to his lips, he remembered that he had something to ask for with his visit today. It was inconvenient to offend that Gu too much, he had to lower his voice and suppress his temper: "Zi Xi, I have something to ask you."

"Speak," Gu Yun mumbled weakly.

Shen Yi swallowed his saliva and asked solemnly, "If I want to propose to Miss Chen, what should I do to not appear too sudden?"

Hearing this, Gu Yun raised his long eyebrows on one side and

said in surprise, "Sudden? What's so sudden?"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun said: "Didn't you also give her the token of love?"

Shen Yi slouched his head and slowly searched his chest. Under Gu Yun's surprised gaze, he slowly took out a small cloth bag wrapped in thin silk, which was tightly wrapped by another layer, he unwrapped three layers to reveal the contents of the bag — it was the "legendary" small hairpin.

"Not given it yet?" Gu Yun mercilessly gave an evaluation, "How fortunate, it's too ugly."

Shen Yi covered his heart silently.

Gu Yun commented: "Searching back and forth for half a day only to pick something so old fashioned, if someone does not know, they would have assumed you bought this as an offering for your grandmother. Moreover, Miss Chen obviously doesn't like such flashy things of pearls and ivory. It was such a waste for you to buy this."

The first half of the sentence, Shen Yi could accept with reluctance and humility. But the second half was not right. Shen Yi immediately asked with caution, "How do you know she doesn't like it?"

Gu Yun waved at him and said: "A woman, unless she is really too poor to afford something, will buy what she likes herself - otherwise, do you think she will be dreaming about it all day long and looking forward to someone to buy it for her?"

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun leaned back and looked at him pitifully, he shook his head and sighed, "You think too much."

Shen Yi appeared very pitiful and helpless at this moment.

Gu Yun was always happy to bully him on regular days, but witnessing his panic at this time, Gu Yun seldom felt a little

sympathy. He silently took an egg boiled in the hot spring from the small tray on the side and handed it to him.

In retrospect, after they joined together to deal with Jia Lai, they each went to different places. Chen Qing Xu went back to Chen's old house then to the capital to take care of Chang Geng. Shen Yi stayed in the Northern Frontier for a long time. Later, Gu Yun transferred him to Jiangnan. One in the north, one in the south, it seemed they had no chance to even say a few words.

Shen Yi was truly incompetent, failing to seize the opportunity to deepen connections with someone who he had been through life and death with. If Miss Chen was not born with the ability to chase others far away, how could he still make a fuss behind her back now?

Gu Yun partially pitied him for his misfortune, but was also angry at him for being dense, he advised: "Even if you have said it in your heart a hundred and eighty times, she still does not know about it. It's useless. Whether it is success or failure, you have to put it all aside temporarily to let her know what you feel first."

Shen Yi said painfully, "Whenever I see her, I do not know what to say."

Gu Yun got to the point: "With your ability to talk nonsense, there's only one reason why you don't know what to say: it's because your sense of purpose is too strong. You feel that you have an intention towards her, and you are afraid of ruining everything, worrying about this and that, hence you dare not speak of it."

Although Shen Yi once complained about Gu Yun's unethical personal lifestyle, at this time, he could only believe him and nod continuously: "Logical."

"You're not in the right mindset," Gu Yun said with great experience. "If you want to be flexible, first of all, you can not be shy, you must treat her as an ordinary person in your heart, do not worship her as a Bodhisattva. Talk to her the way you talk to others - but Miss Chen has been dealing with medicine all year round, she has a peaceful temperament... That is to say, she can be a bit dense. You have to let her feel that you are treating her differently from others

as well. It's a delicate matter. If you don't do enough, she will not notice, but if you use too much force, you will appear obscene. "

There was no telling when Chang Geng had come back. He changed the wine jar into a small wine bottle and asked people to put it on the small stove for warming wine on the side then ordered them to step back. He listened to Gu Yun's talk about romance silently. The two men, one was trying to show off to his heart content, and the other was eager to learn. No one was aware that the emperor had returned.

Shen Yi: "Marshal, please teach me."

Gu Yun said seriously, "I can't teach you about this, because I don't have this problem. Someone as handsome as I, the ladies do not think I'm obscene no matter what I do."

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun: "There's nothing for you to gain from staring at me so eagerly. Besides, it's a matter of understanding the meaning, it can't be taught by two to three words."

Shen Yi desperately suppressed his impulse to beat him, and squeezed a sentence out of his teeth: "Say something more realistic, give me an example."

Gu Yun thought for a moment: "For example, for someone at your age..."

"At what age?" said Shen Yi.

"Tch, for example, a mature man like yourself — mature, alright?" Gu Yun changed his tone and said, "Shouldn't talk about love at all times like a teenager, or else others will think you are not reliable. Words of love must not be used excessively, the most appropriate degree is when you say a hundred serious words with her, combine them with one or two loving words in the middle, which can move the other very much but won't seem frivolous either."

As he finally said a few decent words, Shen Yi hurriedly nodded.

Gu Yun: "This kind of talk also requires skills. Before you do it, you should write a dozen manuscripts in your mind, so it will be smooth, avoid making one sentence contradict the other. In the beginning, you'd better not say anything too explicit, know the boundary. You must make sure the other does not dislike it first, and then make your advance accordingly."

Not far away, the emperor, who was eavesdropping, folded his arms in front of his chest and nodded his head. He generally understood the skills Gu Yun used to deal with him in the past.

Gu Yun: "Although your words should not be too explicit, you have to do well in other areas. For example, you need to think more about her feelings, take care of her at any moment. In the beginning, you need to follow her steps in what to do and what to say. This depends on observation. Watching with your own eyes, it is best not to ask her directly. It will better display your seriousness, and another thing...um, your gaze must be right."

Shen Yi wished he could invite the four treasures of the study* at this moment to write down the golden rules of the Marquis of Order one by one. He didn't dare to miss a word and quickly asked, "What kind of gaze..."

文房四宝, an expression used to denote the brush, ink, paper, and inkstone used in Chinese and other East Asian calligraphic traditions*

He didn't finish talking yet, as he looked up, he met Gu Yun's eyes.

If Gu Yun usually looked at him with the gaze of "Go away, you are blocking my light", then his eyes at this moment expressed "You are my light".

Gu Yun's eyes were subtly between 'concentration' and 'dissociation'. The corners of his eyes were slightly bent as if to reveal a natural smile. His eyes seemed to contain only the person in front of him, at the same time, he seemed to be involuntarily having many thoughts on his mind. His eyelashes were slightly twinkling. As he was caught, his eyelids hung down, creating a very natural 'awkward' smile. He even reached out and rubbed gently under his nose.

Shen Yi: "..."

His hand trembled, he nearly dropped half of the egg he had not finished.

Chang Geng could not watch it anymore. He strode over and coughed heavily.

Gu Yun immediately put down his legs on the small side table and quickly displayed a gentleman-like appearance.

Shen Yi was a little embarrassed, he hurriedly stood up to greet: "Your Majesty."

Chang Geng reluctantly molded his 'smiling on the outside but gritting his teeth on the inside' into a 'gentle' demeanor and waved: "In private, you don't need to be so polite. Subject Shen, sit down."

Subject Shen vaguely felt that it might be time for him to leave.

Chang Geng smiled and said, "I just overheard a few sentences. Why, did you come to talk about Miss Chen?"

Shen Yi felt even more embarrassed.

"I've heard that Miss Chen has great admiration for General Shen since the battle in the Northern Frontier." Chang Geng slowly put the wine bottle on the stove and warmed it. At the same time, his eyelids did not lift as he patted off Gu Yun's hand reaching for the wine bottle. He said to the red-faced Shen Yi, "If the two love each other, there is no need for so much inquiring - I had just retrieved several copies of lost medical classics from the palace. I was about to send someone to bring them to Miss Chen. Would Subject Shen be willing to help me?"

Shen Yi almost knelt down for the emperor. He only felt that these few words of Chang Geng were much more valuable than Gu Yun's long speech.

After an incense of time, Chang Geng watched Shen Yi walk away with satisfaction. In truth, he was the one who was most eager for Shen Yi to get married so that he didn't have to hang around Gu Yun

all the time.

From the time at Yan Hui Town until now, these two people have been inseparable. If there were any difficulties, even if Gu Yun did not tell him, he would definitely notify Shen Yi. Although every time, there was a reason for it, it was impossible for Chang Geng not to put it to heart at all.

After sending this one away, Chang Geng turned to the other.

Gu Yun hurriedly dispatched an affectionate look to greet him.

Chang Geng was not moved, he slowly brought out old debts to calculate: "Even a gaze can also be prepared in advance. Zi Xi, as expected, is well trained and experienced."

Gu Yun blinked, stretched his back, and stood up. He strolled in front of Chang Geng's face, untied his fur cloak and wrapped Chang Geng in it. He lowered his voice and laughed in his ear: "Your Majesty, you should soon let me know if you are drinking vinegar*."

**expression to denote that someone is jealous*

Chang Geng: "..."

He was numbed by Gu Yun's languid whisper, he then realized that this man was proficient in thirty-six strategies, it seemed that everything he taught Shen Yi just now was only the surface.

Gu Yun sniffed at his sideburns and said, "Sour fragrance is overflowing. Your Majesty, let's have a discussion. You just drank a jar of vinegar, allow me to have one sip of wine, is that alright?"

Chang Geng smiled angrily: "In your dreams. You can smell it instead."

Gu Yun clucked his tongue: "Yesterday I can still lick a chopstick, how can it become just smelling today? It's all Shen Yi's fault, having to display his face on the new year occasion…"

Chang Geng took out a chopstick from one side and dipped it in the warm wine cup: "Take it and taste it. Don't bargain."

Gu Yun: "..."

The chopstick emitting wine fragrance was between the two men. After a while, when Chang Geng thought that Gu Yun had become obedient, Gu Yun suddenly took the chopstick covered with wine and sniffed it gently, he then quickly pulled Chang Geng's chin and wiped the wine on his lips, then licked them at lightning speed. The hindering chopstick was thrown to the side with a clacking sound.

Chang Geng was dumbstruck, being stolen a kiss overflowing with wine fragrance, he was unable to react.

Gu Yun finished with a wipe of his lips and floated away with a smile: "Good wine, intoxicating."

The new emperor that was spun around by various teasings stood still for a moment then finally ran after him. He felt that it was very necessary for him to personally check how General Gu's injuries were recovering.

Extra: Truth or Dare (steampunk version)

First posted on Lofter, May 3, 2018

In the second year after the new Emperor Li Min took office, on the 16th of January, the lights in the hot spring courtyard of the Northern Palace were brightly lit.

All the unoccupied soldiers gathered here, and General Shen, who was in the capital to report, deliberately stayed for a few more days. Even His Majesty who was usually diligent found an excuse to suspend the court for one day. With His Majesty in charge, those who want to flatter in the name of 'birthday wishes' were all afraid to show their faces. There were only their own people in the palace, it was both lively and comfortable.

It's not convenient for the soldiers of the Northern Camp to leave their posts without permission for a long time, they all returned to the camp. The sound of singing in the courtyard was fading. Fearing that the atmosphere wasn't lively enough, Cao Chun Hua proposed that everyone play 'drum beating and flower passing'.

"Poetry?" Ge Chen's face changed as soon as he heard this. He waved his hand hurriedly and said, "I won't play, I don't know how to make poetry. I'll beat the drum for everyone."

"Then it seems that I have to be a flower for everyone to pass around," Gu Yun said.

Shen Yi mocked, "Marshal, how can you say such a thing. As a child, you were taught by the palace's Grand Tutor, all the flatterers praised you as a scholarly general every day, and even dared to bring out the talisman with lousy handwriting you created when drunk to sell for thousands of liang."

Gu Yun slapped the table: "Which son of a bitch sold it? Why didn't I get a single coin?"

Master Feng Han knew how to pick his words; upon seeing that

Marshal Gu had the intention of resigning and going home to write calligraphy, he quickly changed the topic, "It's elegant to recite poems and enjoy wine, but it's just like those fairy sounds and elegant music, it's less interesting. We do not need to be so rigid, I think that singing is also very bold and unrestrained..."

Gu Yun said with a smile, "Well said, Master Feng Han! I... "

Hearing that Marshal Gu wanted to 'sing', everyone was shocked, their temples ached as if they had been shot by a Baihong arrow.

Chang Geng quickly took up a piece of crispy meat and stopped Gu Yun's mouth: "Eat more and talk less, your injuries are still not completely healed yet, save your breath. Did you forget the doctor's advice?"

Miss Chen said in a solemn voice: "Yes, Marshal has injured organs, you cannot use your strength just however you please."

Shen Yi could also be flexible, he said cautiously, "Really, you don't need to, Marshal. We all know that you are very good. Let's have a rest."

Ge Chen shivered. "I might have to go put on another coat."

There's a major killing device in the audience, even singing could not be of use. Finally, as the discussion came and went, the civil and military pillars of the country who were tipsy decided to play a very interesting game: Remove the inside of the flower ball, enough for a hand to reach in. Whoever received the flower ball would answer a question from the brocade bag inside. If they couldn't answer the question in the bag, they would be fined three drinks.

After hearing this, Chang Geng immediately raised his hand to cover Gu Yun's Cup: "He can't drink."

Marshal Gu, who had just straightened up, slouched back again and said lazily, "Yes, Your Majesty, then I will just answer nonsense."

His Majesty thought about it. He waved to a personal attendant and whispered a few words. The personal attendant trotted away. After a while, he brought back a small jar and a small porcelain plate.

Everyone stretched their necks to look; when the jar was opened, a sour odor immediately splashed onto their face.

"He can't drink wine, but a few sips of vinegar is alright." Chang Geng said with a smile, "They are all made from grain anyway."

Gu Yun: "..."

He and Shen Yi were both made from flesh. But one can tell just by looking at their faces that they were not of the same kind!

Gu Yun didn't like to eat sweet, even more so with sour. When he was a child, he would throw a tantrum when he smelled vinegar on the dining table. Later, he was beaten by the Old Marquis and no longer made trouble, but even so, he only ate them with much reluctance.

When he saw the things on the porcelain plate, Gu Yun finally changed his face: "In this deep winter, where did this 'fragrant springtime*' come from?"

*香椿, *refers to Chinese cedar*

"It's frozen in the palace's ice cellar, it means 'eternal spring'. How can I make you drink vinegar on an empty stomach? Of course, I'd prepare something small for you." His majesty smilingly picked one with the chopstick. "I'll try it for you."

Gu Yun quickly hid from him three feet away. For a while, he didn't want to get close to a certain someone at all.

In the first round of drumming, the flower ball fell into Cao Chun Hua's hand. Cao Chun Hua clapped his chest, bobbed his head excitedly to the drumbeat for a long time, then pulled out a brocade bag from the inside. Before he could see it, Ge Chen stole it from his hands and read: "Let me see. The question is, 'What is the most important thing in your life?'"

Cao Chun Hua immediately bowed to Chang Geng and said, "Loyalty!"

His Majesty did not buy it and said with a smile, "I don't believe

you. Drink."

Ge Chen raised his hand and was about to pour, Cao Chun Hua scurried: "No, no, no! I will answer it again! Beauty! It's beauty! "

"Not honest," said His Majesty, "Punishment."

The beautiful Cao Chun Hua was crushed by the imperial edict, he had to open his mouth and let Ge Chen pour three cups.

Gu Yun had been lying down since his return from the Liangjiang battle. He had just been released out of the door, not to mention wine, he did not even get to taste the lees. He was green with jealousy watching Cao Chun Hua at this moment.

But envy was useless. In front of him, there was only the 'fragrant springtime' in vinegar, always exuding the sour and bitter smell of insect corpse.

It might be that the greedy insect in his stomach moved the heavens, in the second round, the flower ball fell into his hands.

However, Marshal Gu never knew what the words 'fair play' were since childhood. In order to avoid the vinegar-soaked cedar, he quietly flicked the servant's elbow with his fingers. The servant's arm numbed, his body tilted forward, the drum thumped for one more beat — Gu Yun took this opportunity to put the flower ball into Shen Yi's hand.

Shen Yi: "..."

Why did he sit next to Gu Zi Xi?

The brocade bag that General Shen took out was also fitting with the occasion. The paper in the bag said: "*Have you ever been disciplined in your life? What's the reason for the latest beating?"*

Shen Yi pointed to Gu Yun and said, "I have; it was because of him."

Gu Yun propped up his head with his hands and laughed as if it was something to be proud of.

Chang Geng then asked, "Is it about putting laxatives into the teacher's drink?"

Shen Yi looked at Gu Yun in shock. His eyes are full of accusations, "Why did you reveal the bad things as well? Do you not feel ashamed?"

"It happened a very long time ago," said Gu Yun. "Shen Ji Ping's guts have been small since he was a child. If I hadn't taken him out to play, he would have been delirious from reading books."

Shen Yi sneered: "Following you, yet I have not been beaten silly by my old man, it could be said that he was merciful."

Everyone urged him to tell the story.

"It had been more than ten years since," Shen Yi thought about it and said, "It was before the first rebellion of the Western Regions. I was about sixteen or seventeen years old."

Chang Geng, at sixteen or seventeen, had already traveled around with Lin Yuan Pavilion. Hearing that the matured General Shen was still getting beaten at this age, the group suddenly stretched their necks, eager to hear.

"Emperor Yuan He arranged a marriage for him, it is the daughter of Grand Scholar Guo," Shen Yi said, with bad intentions towards Gu Yun. "She was very beautiful and intelligent. She and the Crown Princess that year, the current Empress Dowager, was referred to as a pair of…"

Gu Yun interrupted him warily: "Don't talk nonsense. You talk as if you have seen her, even I haven't."

With that, he stole a glance at His Majesty by pouring tea. Chang Geng sitting under the light, his eyes and features were much softer than usual. Hearing this, he seemed to reveal a vague smile, bumping slightly against Gu Yun under the table then picked up another piece of cedar on the plate in front of him.

"It's said that Miss Guo has many admirers," said Shen Yi. "Some of them are very dissatisfied and envious when they hear about this

marriage, calling him a player — of course, the people that call him a player are also players themselves, otherwise where do they find so much free time — the leading person of all this is the son of an opposition minister. This man claimed to be the most talented person in the capital. We don't know where the 'talent' is, but everyone knows he loves to sleep around in his free time.

One day, when he went to Xiangyun Pavilion, he met with his significant other, but just after taking off his pants, Xiangyun Pavilion caught on fire, and the fire also happened to be where his room is. In a hurry, the opposition minister's young master wasn't able to find his belt, he had to carry his pants and stepped on the smoke to rush out. From then on, he was given the nickname 'Master Fei Yun'*. Because of this, the opposition minister could no longer have the face to look at anyone, and finally resigned at the end of the year."

**stepping on the cloud*

Miss Chen didn't understand, she asked her fiancé, "Then why did you get beaten?"

Gu Yun laughed and said, "Because this guy didn't listen to me, he didn't dare to walk through the front door after setting off the fire. He had to insist on jumping through the window in the backyard and happened to run into Old Master Shen who was meeting his friends there. Hahaha, although he already put on a disguise, it did not fool his own father."

Xiangyun Pavilion was located behind the Qi Yuan tower. It has a certain style, many literati and scholars would gather together here, and the food was also unique. However, no matter how stylish it was, it was still a brothel after all. The son catching the father meeting his friends here, even if he did not do anything, his embarrassment gave birth to anger, not to mention that his son was also playing tricks.

Although he knew the immoral deed of setting the fire was Gu Yun's plan, Master Shen could not beat the Marquis of Order, thus he had to spray all his anger on his son, beating him until he cried out for his ancestors and stayed in bed for more than a month.

Shen Yi angrily threw the flower ball to Gu Yun: "Compensate for

me."

Gu Yun said: "Why?"

"It was you who planned it. And come to think of it, Marshal has been full of strategies since he was a child. Even the terrain and environment of Xiangyun Pavilion..."

Gu Yun hurriedly said, "Alright, alright, I will compensate for you, Brother Ji Ping, please cease your words."

Gu Yun, under His Majesty's meaningful gaze, picked up a cedar without saying a word and swallowed it like gold.

Until the third round of drumming, Gu Yun still has yet to swallow the piece, holding his breath in agony. He passed Shen Yi the flower ball and went for the tea bowl.

But at the next moment, Shen Yi, who was supposed to pass it to Miss Chen, tossed the flower ball back into Gu Yun's arms at the speed of light.

Gu Yun, who was gargling, almost spit out all his tea. He raised his head in a daze.

Dun. The drum stopped.

Gu Yun: "..."

Shen Yi: "Hahahaha!"

It was inconvenient for Gu Yun to quarrel with Shen Yi in front of all his friends, he had to wave his hand pretending to be generous: "How can there be anything that I cannot let other people know, I…"

He took out the note in the bag, it read: "*What is the greatest consolation for you when you were at the lowest point*?"

Everyone was very curious seeing how Marshal went silent after half a sentence of boasting. Shen Yi leaned over and said, "What did it say?"

Gu Yun closed his fist and hid the note away. He turned his head to look at Chang Geng. For a moment, his gaze was far away, no one knew what he was thinking of. He suddenly smiled.

Chang Geng did not understand, he blinked and asked, "What was written on it?"

The eyes of the young Emperor were clear and sparkling as if all the lights of the Northern Palace are concentrated in that pair of eyes.

"*It wrote about you, silly*," Gu Yun thought, "*Forget it.*"

Then, one by one, he ate all the 'eternal spring' in front of him.

Oh, the taste was very bad. Let's simply eat them for good fortune.

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Extra: A little unknown incident in the Northern Frontier

First posted on Lofter, May 10, 2018

Last time talked about how General Shen finally altered his fate and took advantage of when Marshal had been poisoned by vinegar to throw the flower ball to him so that he could draw that note.

If discussing only 'comfort', then Gu Yun had many. Of course, Chang Geng the Beauty ranked first, but apart from him, then delicious food, entertainments, brothers who he had been through life and death with, playing tricks on Shen Yi, Uncle Wang growing flowers, Old Huo feeding the horses — everything in the world that could make him stop to appreciate and smile held a part of his feelings, and naturally they were his comfort.

But what did 'at the lowest point' mean?

When Gu Yun first saw this line of words, he did not think of the days when he was young when he lost his parents and became deaf and blind.

First, these things had happened a long time ago. Second, it had been this way for decades; he's long used to it anyway. Now, when he recalled the years when he was a child and inherited the title in the Marquis's manor, they were all blurry in his memories. Sometimes, when he remembered some fragments, or when he listened to Uncle Wang mention a few words, he felt as if they had never happened to him.

He did not think of the time when the Westerners surrounded the capital either. At that time, he was already a seasoned and strong man. He knew what he should and should not understand. No one dared to add the word 'little' in front of 'Marquis' any longer. When it came to the Black Iron Camp's three factions, people would think of Gu Yun himself instead of the old Marquis Gu Shen. He was the last wall before the fall of the country; he did not have much time to pity himself.

What the words 'at the lowest point' and 'hopeless' reminded him of was, in fact, the time when Emperor Long An first ascended the throne and appointed him to escort the Northern Barbarian Prince Jia Lai Ying Huo out of the pass ——

Spring arrived very late that year. It was March, yet there was no vitality in the Northern Frontier. The heaven and earth here seemed to have frozen and could never rekindle again. Carcasses of cattle and sheep were hidden in deep snow pits by wolves. When people walked back against the wind, their noses and lips would crack, the strong fishy odor filling their throat.

Before the horse could come to a stop, Shen Yi in Light Armor had dropped down first and walked with quick steps to the front of the Marshal's tent. Before he could lift the curtain, there was a muffled cough coming inside, making Shen Yi's hands tremble with fright.

In front of the Marshal's tent was the commander of the Northern Frontier garrison, who hurriedly said, "It's not Marshal's, it's Master Chen."

"Doctor Chen?"

"Yes, it's said that Master Chen is not in good health and never goes out in winter. This year, he made an exception and journeyed all the way here, he was caught up in the snowstorm just after he left the gate. Even the body and bones of healthy people could not withstand it, let alone him? As soon as he arrived, the doctor himself had collapsed first before he could check up the patient."

Shen Yi had ridden in the snow; his body was covered in the cold mist. Afraid that he would make things worse by rushing in, he retracted his hand that was about to open the tent's curtain.

The anxiousness soaked into his calm eyes and features. It had only been a few days, but his cheeks were already sunken. The horse that was handed over to the guard seemed to be connected with its master's mind and was pacing restlessly.

"The emperor ordered us to send the Barbarian Prince back then return to the northwest." Shen Yi lowered his voice and said to the commander, "We should have been on the road already. The northwest road protection office had sent people to ask several times. Although with the Black Iron Camp's three factions there, they would not dare say anything even if we are a few days late. But it's almost a month! "

The commander lowered his voice to almost a whisper, "Marshal is still..."

Shen Yi shook his head.

"What is the reason?" The commander was puzzled and said, "Marshal grew up in the northwest when he was young. Even if he doesn't sit well with the weather in the capital, it should not be to the point where he could not endure the northern wind. Wasn't he still healthy when he arrived? Or was it the barbarian who caused it? "

"No," Shen Yi didn't want to say too much, a hint of resentment flashed past his eyes. He waved his hand and said, "Don't ask anymore."

Just at this time, a young man came out of the tent. Shaken by the wind, he almost was not able to stand firm, only after a moment did he speak with difficulty, "General Shen, my lord invited you to please come in. He will be performing the acupuncture soon."

"Ah..." Shen Yi hesitated. At last, he did not say anything.

Chen Fei Yun, the second son of the Chen family in Taiyuan Mansion, was a skillful doctor, yet he could not cure himself. He was born frail and sickly. For many years, he was unable to go out. Every time he did so, he would be severely ill and bedridden. This time, for him to come to the bitter cold frontier from thousands of miles away, it was the equivalent to 'risking his own life to save another'.

Logically, listening to his cough, Shen Yi should tell him to rest for a few days. However, the words "*Master Chen, please take care*" turned around on Shen Yi's tongue several times, he finally didn't say it out loud.

He truly had no other choice.

The fire in the Marshal's tent was intensely hot; it seemed that there was a little bloody smell intertwined with the heat radiating onto one's face.

"Put out the braziers." Master Chen's voice came from the tent. His face was covered with a layer of gauze to prevent his coughing from disturbing the patient, causing his voice to sound more stuffy. "Are you not afraid of the heat damaging him? When has your Marshal ever been afraid of the cold?"

When he coughed, his hands would shake, he didn't dare to insert the needle himself and could only instruct the medicine disciple beside him carefully. He was even more nervous than performing it himself; he did not dare to divert his focus for even a little, it had only been a moment, but a sheen of sweat had accumulated on his forehead.

Shen Yi didn't dare to approach and only waited at the entrance.

Half an hour later, Master Chen straightened up: "Alright."

Gu Yun seemed to have regained a little consciousness and was helped up by the medicine disciple. Shen Yi was about to walk to him when he saw Gu Yun push the boy's hands away and doubled over to vomit a mouthful of blood at the bedside.

Shen Yi was scared out of his wits: "Zi Xi!"

Gu Yun could not sit up without assistance; his whole body weakly leaned to one side.

Chen Fei Yun said as he wrote the prescription with a flick of his brush: "It's alright; I have just refreshed him."

Shen Yi: "..."

Gu Yun said in a hoarse voice: "Chen-er*?"

**Er(二) here means second.*

Chen Fei Yun was stunned and asked Shen Yi, "You did not give him any drugs for his ears and eyes these two days, right?"

Shen Yi quickly shook his head and reached for Gu Yun's forehead. He felt the cold sweat in his hand, but the temperature had dropped.

Chen Fei Yun thought for a moment, lowered his head and sniffed at his sleeve, then laughed, "Dog nose."

Gu Yun's eyes were blurred; he barely recognized Shen Yi with great difficulty, speaking in a weak voice: "Why did you invite him here? Too troublesome... How can I possibly die."

"Marshal," Shen Yi said with a wry smile, "The large pot of porridge this morning could be placed on you to cook. If your fever continues to burn again, you will become the first human-shaped Ziliujin mine of Great Liang."

Gu Yun already could not hear, and right now, with his ears buzzing, he was not able to hear much of Shen Yi's words; he didn't seem to care about what Shen Yi said either. His head tilted to the side, and his eyes were closed, there was no telling whether he had gone unconscious again or he had fallen asleep.

"General Shen, why do you always appear as if you're mourning every time I see you?" Master Chen coughed again after finishing writing the prescription. His eyes turned red from the cough, but he was still smiling when he spoke. This man was always happy. In Master Chen's words: people such as himself would not be able to live long, that was already miserable in itself; if they're not more open-minded than others, would it not make them more miserable?

Shen Yi thought: *isn't this bullshit? Eight out of ten people seeking doctors are sick. Should they set off firecrackers to celebrate instead?*

But he was not very close with Master Chen, it was not convenient for him to act too familiar, so he bowed his head and said: "We have troubled brother Chen to travel all the way here."

"Don't worry, Marshal Gu has saved my younger sister, and gets

along well with me. Wait until he gets better, ask him to write calligraphy on my fan for me."

Shen Yi asked hurriedly, "Then his condition is..."

"General Shen should know what the cause is." Chen Fei Yun smiled at him. "He's young, his body has the foundation of a general. As long as he can eat these three days, it will not be a big problem. Don't worry."

What was the cause of Gu Yun's illness?

A year ago, he rushed back to the bed of Emperor Yuan He with His Fourth Highnesses in a hurry, his heart burning with anxiety, to meet the old emperor on his last day.

He said to the old emperor, "*If Your Majesty goes, Zi Xi will no longer have any relatives*."

Only now did he know that he no longer had any relatives for a long time.

Gu Yun was not a stubborn patient, as the commander of three armies, he was in no place to act spoiled; he drank the medicine that was given to him; he ate the food that was fed to him. After he regained consciousness, the private guard followed the doctor's advice and cooked for him a bowl of gruel. Gu Yun ate it all without leaving a bite.

Hearing this, Shen Yi was greatly relieved. The words of Chen's family in Taiyuan mansion were always trustworthy.

Who would have expected that until midnight, the high fever that was suppressed by the needles came back again, all the food he had taken was vomited clean.

Shen Yi broke into Master Chen's tent, only to find out by accident that the master in white was already appropriately dressed, appearing as if he was waiting for Shen Yi to come.

Seeing him, Chen Fei Yun was not surprised: "I'm not talking about only eating, I said he must digest it. Let's go. I'll perform

another acupuncture. Tch, it's all about treating the symptoms, but not the root cause."

Shen Yi took the lead in getting out of the tent and sheltered Master Chen from the wind and snow. Suddenly, he turned around and asked in a low voice, "If...three days later..."

Chen Fei Yun paused and let out a breath of cold air: "Then, General, I'm afraid you must pardon my lack of ability and knowledge. "

Shen Yi's heart sank.

Three days later, Gu Yun, a seemingly cooperative patient, was no better. His body had become noticeably thin as if his spirit had drained. Even more frightening, it was useless no matter what others said. He was deaf in his own world, and no one was able to reach him.

On the evening of the third day, when the teary-eyed guard brought food again, Gu Yun finally tilted his head to avoid it.

The private guard was about to cry; he looked at Shen Yi at a loss.

Gu Yun raised his neck a little, smiled at the young guard, and shook his head — *your noodle soup is very delicious, but vomiting repeatedly, my throat is too sore, I cannot swallow it anymore.*

"It's alright. You go out first." Shen Yi took over the soup bowl, covered it, put it on the small stove on one side, waved his hand to the guard, then took out the liuli glass from his bosom and placed it on the bridge of Gu Yun's nose.

With the cold metal frame's irritation, Gu Yun woke up a little bit. After a while, he gathered enough strength to make gestures at him: *What's the matter?*

Shen Yi stood at the spot for a moment with a complicated look and finally appeared as if he had made up his mind about something very grand. He brought out a letter in his arms: "A reply from the

capital, you..."

They half coaxed and half lied to Chang Geng, sneaking away from the Marquis's manor. On the way, Gu Yun pulled his hairs out but could not think of a way to coax the boy. He simply forced Shen Yi to write for him, then he would make a copy and sent it back.

Chang Geng had replied.

The child of the former emperor Yuan He and the Barbarian woman.

The reason why Chang Geng lived in exile and grew up in Yanhui Town was that his mother had become a scapegoat for his father's attack on the Black Iron Camp.

Through the liuli glass, Gu Yun and Shen Yi stared at each other expressionlessly. After a moment, he spoke:"...Get out. "

Shen Yi lifted a corner of his lip, put the letter tube on the head of his bed, then took his leave, but after a few steps, he couldn't help turning back: "Zi Xi, you..."

A sound answered him — Gu Yun swiped the letter tube to the ground.

Shen Yi suspected that he had made a stupid move, he intended to go to Doctor Chen to see if he had another way. The Marshal's tent was dead silent that not even a gust of wind could enter.

Gu Yun leaned on the head of the bed, his body almost hollowed out by the serious illness. He seemed to have suddenly fallen off a cliff. He had been on the other side of the abyss for the past twenty years, he felt as if he had already passed. Who would have thought that looking back now, it was still far out of reach.

He glanced at the tube rolling on the ground — half a month ago, he was still looking forward to this reply very much. His little Chang Geng just joyfully wished him a happy birthday the day before, he left without bidding goodbye on the next.

That child thinks excessively, he must be very pained.

Gu Yun's hand was so thin that there was only one layer of skin left, green veins visible on the surface.

"Shiliu, take your medicine!"

"…… Don't move. Be careful not to burn yourself with the hot porridge! "

"Yifu, you are the best person to me in the world."

"I won't go, I have to practice my swordsmanship! Who will take care of you in the future if you don't learn well?"

"Yifu, don't come in until you have finished your noodles."

There were eggshells in that bowl of noodles which was boiled to paste, similar to the bowl Shen Yi just put on the stove.

The stove slowly roasted the bottom of the bowl, and the subtle smell overflowed from the gap, like on the 16th day of the first month, in the quiet and freezing cold of the capital, the bowl that greeted him at the door.

Gu Yun's chest heaved violently for several times. He suddenly struggled to get up, but his soft knees pulled his entire body to kneel on the ground. He dragged a Wind Slasher in the tent to use as a crutch and propped himself up, grabbing the tube that rolled far away. His hands that were devoid of strength shook violently, only after a while did he manage to open it.

Dear yifu,

Since you left, there are no relatives in the large capital city, there is only a piece of your armour accompanying me that I can talk to for comfort...

I have nothing beside me, only a piece of your shoulder armor.

The plum blossom in the manor is about to wither. I hope you saw the flower before you left. Otherwise, its heart will be in vain for another

year. Even if it will bloom every year, it will not be the same as this one.

Northwest military affairs are plenty, I should not write to disturb you often, should I?

You must be very busy, perhaps you do not miss me... But I'm different.

The capital is so lonely. I have no one to miss except you.

Gu Yun's hands couldn't hold the light letter paper, the Wind Slasher fell to the ground with a 'clang'. The vibration of the metal spread far away, the frightened guards rushed in one after another.

That night, Gu Yun endured the pain and drank the bowl of noodles soup with the smell of blood. He did not vomit any more.

Master Chen's prediction was very accurate. After three to five days, he could get up from the bed and walk. Half a month later, he had recovered completely. Gu Yun buried the secret of the Northern Frontier here, together with the state of his fragile bones.

From then on, his frivolous youth was left behind; he grew up, becoming invulnerable.

The vast army went westward with thousands of miles of dust.

Extra: Fireworks of the world

Extra 5 from JJWXC

After going through a challenging year, Great Liang was stable. The military reform was pushed forward smoothly with the help of Gu Yun's transparent attitude. Shen Yi finally summoned the courage to request the emperor for his retirement.

Chang Geng didn't make a statement after hearing about it, only keeping his request of resignation and did not sign it, telling Shen Yi to go home and think about it carefully.

General Shen's plea was full of grandiose nonsense. There was only one reason for him to resign — He wanted to marry a wife.

The background of his wife's family was complicated; they did not want to get involved with the government, therefore, he planned to hang up his seal and go home, gather what he had to build a stable business, then take his family's possession to her family to live as a son-in-law.

Chang Geng went home and asked, "Zi Xi, do you think Old Master Shen knows about this?"

Gu Yun: "I'm not sure. But even if his father knows, he can't control him."

Shen Ji Ping seemed to be gentle, flexible, docile, and was easy to bully. However, when we looked at his behavior, whenever he decided on something, people around him were always appalled by his deviant behavior that challenges a person's morality for half a lifetime, yet we still have the illusion that he was a 'dependable man', setting a clear example of 'a biting dog doesn't bark'.

This man's ambition became more and more strange, which had gone through a series of unprepared transitions from 'Han Lin' to 'Mechanic' to 'soldier' to 'general' and then to a 'stay at home son-in-law'.

With a son like this, it's no wonder that old man Shen retired early to learn cultivation.

Gu Yun sighed: "Forget it. I'll find Shen Ji Ping to have a chat in a few days."

Chang Geng's face turned black as soon as he heard it — he wanted to talk again!

As soon as these two men started to talk, it's not sure how far back they could talk. At that time, the soldiers would get together, making it into a big table, drinking wine and eating. Although Chang Geng knew that Gu Yun was only boasting to his face and would not indulge himself in eating and drinking without restraint, he was sure that Gu Yun would have to stay at the Northern Camp throughout the night without coming home again, which was very annoying.

Although the emperor didn't say anything in person, he wrote a letter to Chen Qing Xu to inform her of this right away.

In the letter, he sincerely said to her, "*The country is a mess waiting to be rebuilt. Just at this time, when we lack people, such a capable minister as Master Shen had taken his leave, whether it is on a personal or a business level, it is a pity..."* so on and so forth...

Shen Yi never mentioned to Chen Qing Xu about the matter of leaving office. It was his own decision.

After receiving the letter from Chang Geng, Miss Chen went back to her home in Shanxi in silence that day, smoothly leveling out the Chen family. Then she took advantage of the Large Eagle that had been put into trial operation between the northwest and the capital to fly back to the capital. She found Shen Yi and asked him frankly, "I am the head of the Chen family. If you have any trouble with my family, why didn't you come to find me to resolve it?"

Shen Yi: "..."

After Gu Yun heard about this, he took it home and laughed about it for half a year. After half a year, the generals of the garrisons all over the country sent congratulatory letters to General Shen on

how he had finally found a prominent family to marry himself to. They also strongly 'demanded' that the Marquis of Order should cause great troubles at the newlywed chamber on behalf of all the brothers who were unable to come in person.

Gu Yun, who was afraid that there was not enough chaos in the world, readily agreed. Several days in advance, while coming to help the Shen Manor, he also thought of more than ten ways to torment Shen Yi.

Through his long experience of fighting in wisdom and bravery with that Gu, Shen Yi had reached the point where he only needed to see his evil smile to know what kind of stinking scheme he had in mind. To protect his life, he found a backup for himself in advance — he went to see the emperor in private.

Shen Yi said to Chang Geng in a business-like manner: "Your Majesty, I have been sorting out the old things for a while. Suddenly, I remembered that Marshal Gu had given me four letters in the Jiangnan battlefield. Two of them were personal letters to you. One of them had been sent right away at the time by order; but there had not been a chance to give you the other, I do not know what was written in it. Does Your Majesty need me to submit it?"

Chang Geng could guess what was going on as soon as he heard it — Gu Yun had prepared a stack of letters before the battle to stabilize people's hearts everywhere, and the remaining one hadn't been issued so far, he could guess that it was Gu Yun's farewell note.

He hesitated for a moment: "Then thank you for your trouble, Subject Shen.”

"I dare not," Shen Yi rubbed his hands. "Your Majesty, I have one more thing to ask..."

It's very simple to deal with Gu Yun. It's just that Shen Yi hadn't realized this trick for so many years, but Chang Geng was very familiar with it.

He just had to go back and say to Gu Yun, "Miss Chen has exerted herself for all these years, now she only wishes to marry in peace."

Gu Yun did not say a word; he immediately tossed his brothers' request out of the sky.

Not only did he not make trouble, but he also used his connection to order a batch of newly created fireworks from the civilian-oriented branch of Ling Shu Institute with his own money. As soon as the right time came, Shen Manor in the Capital and the Northern Camp in the far suburb will lit them up at the same time; the bright fireworks made the night sky appear as if it was daytime.

Although no one made trouble, Shen Yi's tolerance of liquor was very poor. After a round of guests, the bridegroom still had too much. He brought two cups to Gu Yun with his tongue twisted and a full stomach of what he wanted to say.

After a hiccup, he suddenly remembered that he was in the full view of everyone. Many words were difficult to speak aloud; he stood there with his eyes wide, stunned, and silly.

Gu Yun sighed, "Future blessings for you, brother Ji Ping."

He took over both cups of wine, clinked them with each other, then drank his as well as Shen Yi's portion.

Since he started to prepare this wedding in Shen Yi's stead, Gu Yun felt inexplicably happy. It was not the sudden substantive happiness of 'earning the Zhang Yuan title' or 'winning the war'. He didn't have any specific joy when he carefully thought about it; it's just that he felt pleased wherever he looked.

Shen Yi grabbed his shoulder and hugged him tightly, wanting to laugh and cry at the same time, as if he didn't know what to express.

Gu Yun said in a low voice, "Are you happy this time?"

Shen Yi didn't know what to say, so he nodded.

In the early days of riding into the battlefield, who would have thought there would be today?

Gu Yun: "Live well in the future, don't talk so much nonsense bullshit to your wife."

Shen Yi was half smiling and half crying; he clenched his fist and patted Gu Yun twice on the back.

"Come on, don't wipe your snot on me, and don't let your bride wait for long," Gu Yun pushed him. "I'll stop the ‘enemy’ for you here. Go."

Shen Yi moved forward two steps then looked back, it's true that with Gu Yun standing there like a pillar, no one dared to pester him anymore.

Suddenly, he felt sentimental again. General Gu has guarded the gate of the country, the gate of the city, and the gate of the palace all his life. This time, he used his grand ability for the meager task of guarding the wedding chamber for him — yet he seemed to be very happy about it.

Shen Yi felt his nose sour, with thousands of regrets in his heart, he hurried back and quickly confessed in Gu Yun's ear: "Zi Xi, the letter you wrote in Jiangnan that hasn't been opened yet, I have given it to His Majesty, you... *cough*... Anyway... I'll go first. "

Gu Yun: "..."

He had bullied Shen Yi since they were young until they grew up. As he finally treated this person well with much difficulty, unexpectedly, he was met with this kind of betrayal, swallowing the word ‘karma’ whole.

At the end of the lively wedding banquet, Gu Yun stiffly went back to the Marquis's manor — Chang Geng only drank a cup of wedding wine and left after giving his present. The emperor coming personally was enough to show honor and blessing, staying for too long will make the people around uncomfortable. Thus, he had been waiting for Gu Yun at home for a long time, the light in the room was still on.

Gu Yun came up with a bad idea on the way. He asked people to take a pot of strong liquor, sprinkle it on the front sleeve, and made himself smell like a human-shaped wine pot. At this time, he pretended to ‘stagger’ and pushed open the door with a strong force.

Chang Geng was looking at something under the light. He was shocked by the wind outside the door and the strong odor of wine. He frowned slightly. When he looked up, he saw Gu Yun stumble over the threshold and fall straight in.

Chang Geng hurriedly pushed the thing in his hand away and quickly came to catch him, shivering at the touch of Gu Yun's ice-cold hands.

Although Gu Yun usually frolicked around with overflowing energy, his hands and feet were always cold regardless of summer or winter. Whether it was taking medicine or acupuncture, they all harmed his body. But the man himself had never voiced his complaints, and Chang Geng didn’t dare to show too much concern on regular days; thus, he could only look after him carefully.

At the same time, Gu Yun no longer insisted on the habit of wearing only a layer of clothing to float around in the cold winter in his older years. The two of them each adjust a little of themself to fit with the other, a quiet understanding emerged between the two people, with no need to express them by words.

Chang Geng wanted to put his hands into his arms, but the drunkard didn't cooperate, his martial arts were outstanding, leaving him helpless.

Chang Geng: "Zi Xi! God... How much did you drink? Have you lifted your ban today?"

Gu Yun groaned, placing the weight of his whole body on Chang Geng, his hands caressing his waist disorderly. While Chang Geng was busy dealing with him, he pushed him to the desk. At the same time, he secretly opened his eyes and swept his gaze across Chang Geng's shoulder — the letter that he had forgotten about was there and had not been opened yet!

Gu Yun's heart was filled with great joy of luck. He pretended to be drunk, stumbling, and hit the desk on his side, knocking it over. With a bang, the paper and pen on the desk hit the ground. Chang Geng was almost brought down by him.

Chang Geng hurriedly supported him. He even half dragged and half hugged the troublesome man to bed. He was tossing around until sweat gathered on his forehead.

The drunkard still refused to lie down obediently, vaguely pulling him and shouting: "Beauty...don't go. "

Chang Geng asked abruptly, "Who are you calling?"

T/N: reminds me of chapter 46.

Gu Yun: "...Darling Chang Geng."

His voice was low and hoarse, and was a little mumbly, making Chang Geng's scalp numb.

Gu Yun spread his arms: "Lie down for a moment with yifu... yifu loves you to death... "

Chang Geng: "..."

He was used to tidiness. In fact, he wanted to turn around and gather the collapsed table and the fallen items. However, with Gu Yun clinging so tightly to him, he was in a dilemma between ‘cleanliness’ and ‘lust’, in the end, His Majesty still succumbed to the latter, he turned over to turn off the lights and pulled down the bed curtains.

When Chang Geng returned to his senses the next day to try to clean up, he discovered that the letter which he could not gather the determination to open was missing from the pile of important and unimportant things on the table. Only then did he know that he had let ‘beauty make his mind faint’ and was fooled by a certain someone once again.

Gu Yun's power to play coy and divert the topic was unparalleled in the world. His lips were even tighter than the gap on the golden box of the Black Armor. He refuses to admit that there was such a

'letter' in this world. Shen Yi, the only person who knows about it, was feeling guilty with his self-consciousness; he pretends to be dead every day and refuses to show up to testify.

Chang Geng kept this matter in mind for half a year, but he never found out the whereabouts and the contents of the letter. Gradually, he was no longer concerned about it.

Thinking about it, he didn't have the courage to open it at the first time and finally gave Gu Yun a chance to take advantage of it at the last second. Perhaps, he was not destined to read the farewell note.

The real man in the flesh was still right here battling in wits with him, for what reason must he find out about those painful words?

Just this once, Chang Geng felt he could believe Gu Yun's nonsense — that there had never been such a letter in the world.

Extra: Clarity after the rain

Extra 4 from JJWXC
**the characters used for 'Clarity' here are qingming(清明) which is a reference to the Qingming Festival.*

Chang Geng claimed that to avoid suspicion, even if he slept at the palace at night occasionally, he would never set foot in the harem. The harem's businesses should still be presided over by the empress. Fortunately, Li Feng's harem was not prosperous; even the sickly empress could handle it.

An emperor who came to the palace to work and disappeared after the court dismissed was something never seen before. At first, some people came out and said such things were unethical, but were all scolded back to their places. At the beginning of the emperor's accession, he had claimed he was only an 'acting emperor'. Now, the emperor had indeed stayed in line diligently without going beyond the proper order, how could there always be such flatterers who were afraid that the world won't be in chaos and tried to encourage him to steal the country?

The imperial censorate led by Xu Ling became a pot* for the Emperor's use. It put 'destroy the old and create the new' on its head. It was especially responsible for finding various theoretical bases for the government orders on the court every day, to make the quarrels more legitimate.

**slang for someone who takes the blame for others*

The emperor who didn't live in the palace sometimes pretended to go back to Yan Wang Manor. He later made Yan Wang Manor into a 'living room' for him to occasionally meet with the court officials in private. He would then return to the Marquis manor in the blink of an eye, after all, only a short walk separated them.

This year's rain came down a lot earlier than the previous years. On the eve of the Qingming Festival, there was a continuous drizzle.

Gu Yun still had not hung up his armor and retired, but he was able to live a stable life in the capital. Seldom has there been such a strong sense of belonging to his home, he ordered people to renovate the manor engulfed in wild weeds. After several days, the Marquis manor rumored of having ghosts finally began to appear like a residence.

When the garden was being repaired and the house was being renovated, they discovered a lot of old things, so it became a new hobby for the emperor to follow after Commander Huo to rummage through them.

"Does this belong to the First Princess that year?" Chang Geng pointed to a square box and asked — to show his respect, he did not touch it at will.

An old lady servant currently cleaning the room looked at it and smiled: "Of course, it's specially made for the little marquis."

She opened it. In the box that looked as if it was made to store pearls and treasures, there was a feather duster.

Chang Geng: "..."

The old woman said: "The Marquis was very mischievous when he was young. He never put any scolding in his heart. If they ground him in his room to reflect on his actions, he would pick the lock and get out. He also knew how to run to the kitchen to steal food. It will not work if he was beaten lightly. The old Marquis is hot-blooded, always wanting to bring the family laws out to teach the child. Your Majesty also knew how those laws are; the old Marquis was also forceful, how can little children endure them? The Princess was afraid of an accident. Once, she was on the march with the army; she saw a village woman carrying a broom to teach her son, so she came up with such a way to deal with him. "

Chang Geng took out the feather duster that had beaten Marshal Gu with his hands. He saw that the inside of the duster was a thin pole that would break if one used too much force, so as not to kill someone. There was a thick layer of 'feathers' outside, it was also not a real pheasant feather, but was made up of thin little bamboo and a

kind of thick hair from an unknown animal. If whipped on the body...

Chang Geng grew up in the Marquis's manor. He appeared more like the real master than its actual master, although the old servant changed the way of addressing him to 'Your Majesty', it still does not sound distant. She said happily, "When our Marquis was a child, he truly was troublesome, climbing on the roof and uncovering the tiles. Later, he was afraid of this thing, whatever he did, as long as you bring this out, he will be good for a while."

Gu Yun has always appeared like a nimble elder in front of Chang Geng, possessing a knowledgeable attitude towards everything, but childhood remained a blank page for Chang Geng, so he listened with great interest.

"It was entertaining when the Princess wanted to hit him. He runs all over the yard, crying and howling as if something did happen."

Chang Geng said: "As if? Then was he pretending?"

"Of course, he was," the old servant woman sighed as she walked, "when our little Marquis was a child, if he was not seriously punished, don't expect him to shed real tears. You can see him crying all over the yard, his mouth incredibly flexible, often acting pitiful, saying such things as, *'Mom, don't you like me anymore?', 'Don't you want me anymore?' 'Am I not the flesh that came from your body?'* Or, *'Do you want to change me for a better younger brother? I will be better, please don't change me for a brother. I only have one mother, if you don't love me, I will become a stray child nobody wants...'* Those who heard it all felt their heart moved; the Princess could no longer bear to punish him."

When Chang Geng imagined the scene, he laughed until he couldn't breathe. Gu Yun was a great strategist. He had known from an early age what was 'truth and false coexist' and 'how to attack a person's heart'.

The old servant's eyes wrinkled with a smile; then her voice suddenly changed: "Later he went to the frontier, and everything was different after he came back."

Chang Geng's smile faded.

The old lady recalled: "Every day he shut himself in his room, ignored everyone and did not cry either. When food was sent in, it would be returned the same way. No one was able to coax him, and he did not walk through the door. He changed entirely, at first he was a little monkey, after returning he was a little demon — it took two to three months for the old Marquis to settle the affairs in the north and return home. I say, the old Marquis's treatment of his son was ruthless. Maybe because of this, the old Marquis was afraid that he would become crippled."

Chang Geng asked softly, "How did he treat him?"

"The old Marquis kicked open his door and forcefully pulled him out of the room. Think about it: his eyes are badly injured, how could they not hurt in the sunlight? He staggered after his father with tears flowing, this time, it's true tears, but he didn't say a word." The old servant woman reached out and pointed, "It's that small pond. The old Marquis netted the whip around the Marquis's neck, pressed his head and forced him to look into the water and shouted in his ear, 'Look at your current appearance. Do you deserve to be named Gu?' "

Chang Geng followed her fingers to look and saw the pool that had been dry for many years. But in the past two days, he had refilled the water and raised several new fishes; they were swimming and swinging their tails side to side contentedly.

"The little Marquis's throat was stuck in the whip; he roared back '*I can't see*'."

Chang Geng seemed to go back several years with her words, his hand that was holding the feather duster twitched slightly.

"The old Marquis pressed his head in the water and said, '*If you can't see then submerge in the water and see, either you will learn to stand up, or else find a place to hang yourself, Gu family would rather have no heir than raise a worthless child*."

The old servant said, shaking her head, "It was truly harsh, even after all these years, this old woman still remembers every word."

There was no sound between the two for a short time. After a long moment, Chang Geng asked in a low voice, "The old Marquis had the heart to do such a thing?"

"As a parent, everyone would naturally feel distressed, but what could we do if we are reluctant to do so? The old Marquis said that if the bone breaks, it can only be wedged with steel nails. The more painful the situation is, the more he must know that he had nowhere to rely on. Otherwise, he will lean on it and will never be able to stand up for the rest of his life." The old servant said, "If the old Marquis had been reluctant, then who could rightfully gather the scattered Black Iron Camp around ten years ago?"

Without the Black Iron Camp, Great Liang might have been devoured step by step the first time the Western regions revolted; there was no need for the Westerners to come all this way to take a bite. How long could the old nobles continue to live in luxury?

"In the cold winter months, the old Marquis forbid the servants from letting him wear a padded cotton coat to protect him from the cold. The child's hands and feet were blue from the cold; even a bowl couldn't be carried when he came back to the house. More than ten iron puppets surrounded him all day long. The old Marquis only watched, as if he would not blink even if the Marquis died. After two or three years, both husband and wife passed away one after another, Emperor Yuan He then brought the little Marquis into the palace." The old servant stopped from speaking as they heard a sharp birdsong around the corner. When they looked up, they saw that Gu Yun was casually approaching, carrying a birdcage. It was the unlucky bird from the man, Shen. He viciously shook the cage; the bird's organs were flipping upside down; it could not speak and had to scream at the top of its voice.

Since Gu Yun had time to teach the bird, he had never been inferior in the fight between humans and birds. At this time, he was taking a walk with his victory spoil — he was so proud until he saw what Chang Geng was holding from far away. He first narrowed his eyes, then his face suddenly turned black.

Gu Yun quickly walked over and grabbed the feather duster. "Why are you bringing this broken thing out to play!"

Years-long injury, even if they were cured, there was a chance they will leave residual effects. For example, Gu Yun was unlikely to hear and see clearly for the rest of his life. And although Chang Geng was rid of the nightmares, if he thought too much or was too tired during the day, there would be many dreams at night.

That night, no one knew if it was because he still remembered the "feather duster" that had been stolen by Gu Yun, but Chang Geng had a very strange dream. He saw that he was walking into the Marquis's manor, but it was not the manor he was familiar with. At least, it was not as depressing as he remembered. There were people bustling about and it seemed much more lived in.

Far away, Chang Geng heard the sound of metal colliding. He followed it and saw a group of murderous iron puppets besieging a little boy in the backyard. The little boy's eyes were covered with a layer of black cloth, half of his face was hidden, struggling to dodge from side to side.

All of a sudden, an iron puppet approached him from behind. The long sword in its hand that had been changed into an iron bar swept towards him. It seemed that he could feel the wind of the attacker; the little boy subconsciously wanted to avoid it.

Wait, he couldn't hide like this!

At this moment, the words that Gu Yun taught him many years ago suddenly arises in Chang Geng's mind: "When your heart is in a panic - your legs will become unsteady. If your feet are not stable, no matter how skilled your swordsmanship is, it would be nothing more than water without a source, trees without roots."

Of course, the boy's speed couldn't be faster than the iron puppet's. After a moment's hesitation and contraction, he was quickly caught up by the iron puppet. With a loud noise, the monster's iron bar hit the young boy's back, his clothes tear open on the spot, revealing the inner armor. His body flew out.

Chang Geng hurried forward and picked up the little boy who was half-covered with dust. At the same time, he took the sword from his waist and shut down several iron puppets continuing the chase,

causing them to stand still on the spot.

He dropped the sword and tried to untie the cloth on the boy's face with trembling hands. However, he could hear footsteps approaching behind him. Chang Geng turned around and saw a middle-aged man slowly walking forward with hands behind his back. The man was dressed in plain clothes and had a beautiful face, like a scholar with an elegant demeanor, but his eyes were dyed with belligerence. When facing him directly, Chang Geng could see the illusion of a thousand army's swords and blades.

Chang Geng had never seen this man. Although after growing up, Gu Yun's appearance bore no similarity to him, he still recognized his identity as soon as he saw him face to face — their facial features were not like each other, but on this pair of father and son was something that was passed down through generations.

The man stood still and said to Chang Geng, "Even if you take him away from here, you won't be able to raise him. Even if you did, he won't be able to withstand trials and hardships..."

Chang Geng carefully held the boy's thin body: "He can rely on me."

The old Marquis shook his head. Chang Geng suddenly heard the roar of the golden box burning behind him. He quickly took the boy in his arms and dodged. The group of iron puppets which he had shut down arranged into an orderly formation, each of them split to two. In a moment, they transformed into an army of iron Heavy Armors, staring at him intently. In the distance, there was an indistinct sound. The entire group of iron puppets started to move, charging forward.

Chang Geng had to pick up little gu Yun and run like mad. He wanted to yell at the old man who looked on at the scene indifferently — *I could even fix up this old and battered country, how could I not protect one Gu Yun?*

However, he could not find his voice in the dream. Running in a hurry, he suddenly stepped on thin air. Chang Geng's heart leaped heavily. He reached out, wanting to hold on, but what he grabbed onto was a different hand.

He suddenly opened his eyes and saw that the steam lamp in the room had been turned on, but it was not bright outside. Meanwhile, he was holding Gu Yun's hand tightly.

Gu Yun rubbed his head: "How come you could not wake up today? Are you feeling uncomfortable? "

Chang Geng stared at him for a moment: "I had a dream."

Gu Yun was shocked.

"It's not a nightmare, it's not the Bone of Impurity." Chang Geng turned over, hugging Gu Yun's entire arm to his chest, rubbed his forehead against Gu Yun's elbow, and whispered, "I dreamed that I snatched you from the old Marquis's hand, and your father sent an iron puppet battalion to pursue me."

Gu Yun was stunned at first, then laughed aloud. With a little strength, he pulled the emperor out of the pile of quilts and drew out his arm: "Your Majesty, your guts are quite large, there are a hundred thousand of underworld soldiers in the old man's hands — Alright, time of displaying your might is over. Get up quickly. There is a grand court meeting today. Well, that being said, the Qingming Festival is also near, perhaps the old man came back to remind that he lacks paper money over there."

Chang Geng sat by the bed and looked at him, staring to his heart's content from head to toe with the light. Only until Gu Yun finished putting on his clothes did he retract his gaze, "If your father is short of paper money, why did he find me instead of you?"

"Perhaps he saw that you are easy to bully." Gu Yun said with a smile, then his smile gradually changed, "I don't owe him anything, and I guess he's embarrassed to come to see me."

On the day of the Qingming Festival, Chang Geng spared most of the day to accompany Gu Yun to visit the tomb of his parents.

Gu Yun did not speak a word in front of the memorial plaque as if he was practicing the monk's silent meditation, only burning the paper money like carrying out a duty. After finishing, he stood on

one side with indifference.

What he did over the years, he didn't have to speak of them. Those two should already know.

However, Chang Geng put on the incense and offered the wine conscientiously. With Gu Yun here, he could not speak aloud and could only say in his heart, "*I will take care of him in the future. You both can rest assured, don't wedge steel nails on him anymore.*"

"Let's go." Gu Yun gently pulled him.

Chang Geng returned to his senses and was about to come with him when he saw Gu Yun casually turn to the Princess's memorial plaque: "Look after your husband carefully, tell him to stay obediently down there. Don't come and disturb my man."

Chang Geng: "..."

After listening to these treacherous words, the accompanying Huo Dan almost knelt down and kowtowed to death in front of the old Marquis. Gu Yun gave a light snort and turned to take Chang Geng away.

It seemed that his words truly worked. Ever since then, Chang Geng never dreamed of old Marquis Gu and his iron puppet army again.

Extra: A father's sincere heart

Additional Extra 2 from jjwxc

Cute Gu parents and Gu baby uwu
Happy father's day, papa Gu~

(I)

After entering the pass, one would be met with the plains for thousands of miles, then continue for a short distance; once passing Changping, the post station on the way has already hung the flag of the Northern Camp — this was the capital city.

A group of Black Iron Light and Heavy Armor soldiers came back from the Northern Frontier with a large army behind them. An advance troop was led by the Marquis of Order, Gu Shen, himself. This advance troop was the elites among the Black Iron Camp's three armies. It accompanied a large quantity of Ziliujin, as well as important prisoners of war, such as the father and son of the Wolf King and the goddess of the Eighteen Tribes.

Except for the almost solemn footsteps and the sound of horses' hoofs, there was absolutely no private idle chatter where the army passed. Everyone moved in unison. At first glance, it was difficult to distinguish whether this was a group of human or iron puppets.

When they entered the Northern Camp, the leading Black Cavalry pushed his iron mask up and raised a hand to signal the stop. Thousands of elite soldiers halted at the same time behind him, motionless and frozen in place. The unimaginable sense of oppression was overwhelming. The guards on duty in the Northern Camp shivered, feeling goosebumps rising all over.

One of the private soldiers trotted forward, holding a Black Iron Tiger emblem in both hands and handing it to the Northern Camp guard.

Only then did the guard know that it was Marshal Gu who came

in person. With his mind exploding, he ran to report the news. Before leaving, he had the courage to sneak a look at Marshal Gu, who was wearing Light Armor sitting on his horse's back. He saw that the man was tall, did not have three heads and six arms. He was about thirty years old, his face dyed with a little bit of wind and frost. His facial features were handsome. His image was somewhat different from the renowned talented general who led the black whirlwind army to raze down the Eighteen Tribes.

Just then, Gu Shen seemed to feel his line of sight. He tilted his head to look with an expressionless face. The guard's gaze, which had not been retracted in time, suddenly met with it. Instantly, his chest was cold. There was a kind of illusion that he was pierced. He ran away without looking back.

People all said that Marshal Gu was born with the Po Yun star; he truly was not a human being.

(II)

Although the Northern Barbarians who were sent back to the capital were only prisoners, the emperor still ordered for them to be treated with courtesy and sent them to the official Posthouse of Honglu temple where they were served with good food and drinks. After that, there was a grand court meeting followed by the rewarding of the three armies. It was late at night when Gu Shen was able to return to the manor.

When he unloaded his armor, he also retracted his murderous aura that could even sadden the demons. Looking at his back alone, he was no different from the royals and nobles riding in carriages in the capital.

Upon entering the door, Gu Shen patted the iron puppet's shoulder in front of his house. He breathed out a long sigh and showed a little exhaustion. His private guard, Huo Dan, was only seventeen this year and was still a child. He had been following him to eat sand in the Northern Frontier. This was the first time he came to the capital city, following behind his commander with wide eyes that shifted back and forth, afraid that his eyes were not enough to

use.

Everything in the Marquis's manor from the screens to the windows, to the steam lamp at the gate, they all appeared brand new to the country boy.

Gu Shen pointed to Huo Dan and said to the butler, Uncle Wang, who came to welcome him, "Find a place for this kid to stay. Don't let him starve."

"Yes," said the butler.

Huo Dan hurriedly said: "Marshal, can't I follow you?"

Some of the servants behind the butler laughed. Gu Shen patted him on the back of his head: "I'm going to Her Highness's place, what are you following me for?"

There was a princess tent in Black Iron Camp, but this time the princess did not go with him. Huo Dan only heard of her reputation and has never seen her. For him, the princess was almost like a goddess far out of reach. When Huo Dan heard the words "Her Highness", his face turned as red as a monkey's bottom. When he came back to his senses, Gu Shen had gone far.

Marshal Gu dismissed all the servants and walked all the way to the backyard. At the door, he first adjusted his clothes, then said, "Gu Shen is requesting an audience with Your Highness."

An old nanny at the door smiled so wide one could not see her eyes, "The Marquis is always so over courteous. Please hurry and enter."

In the Great Liang Dynasty, the First Princess was more precious than the regular princess, and the First Princess with grand abilities was even more precious — while the only bloodline of the previous emperor, the holder of the Black Iron Tiger emblem, was the most precious in the world. Even the emperor should respectfully call her aunt whenever he saw her.

Gu Shen entered the room and patiently waited for the nanny and the maidens to go away, only then did he change to a completely

different face.

The solemnity on his face that appeared awe-inspiring even when he was not angry all faded, not only so, there seemed to be an element of impropriety dyed in his features. He wrapped his arms around the princess's waist and whispered: "I miss you so much... honestly, I just want to throw all those people out. Tong' er*, next time, follow me to the border, it's my territory. Even if I want to hold you and ride on the same horse, no one would dare to say a word. "

**she's a royal descendant so I'm assuming her full name is Li Tong.*

The First Princess said with a smile, "Then certainly the Marshal's might will be all gone."

Gu Shen took off his outer coat, moving behind the screen to wash up. Upon returning, he didn't put on his clothes properly and instantly pulled the princess's hand, but was brushed off by his wife.

The princess lowered her voice and said, "Don't make any noise, your son is here."

Gu Shen instantly could no longer laugh. He lifted the bed curtain and saw a small lump occupying the whole bed, sleeping, limbs thrown on all sides.

Gu Shen's face darkened: "How come this stinky kid sneaked in again?"

Gu Yun, the little Marquis in the Marquis's manor, of course, had his own nanny. However, this little thing was born with an indescribable eccentricity. Usually, he was not picky with strangers, did not mind who was holding him, did not cry no matter who he was playing with. However, at a young age, he already had an idea of estrangement in his heart. So far, he didn't accept any nanny, only his mother.

On one occasion, he dodged a large group of servant girls, sneaked into the princess's room, and hid under the bed. That night, when the princess came back and found out, it was already in the middle of the night, the princess didn't have the heart to send him

away, thus letting him stay.

Since then, Gu Yun seemed to have his ren and du meridians open. In order to take root in his mother's room, there was no length he would not go to, using every trick to climb onto the princess's bed.

When his parents were having a moment of "a reunion even sweeter than honeymoon due to momentary separation," having a brat blocking in the middle was beyond irritating, even if he was a blood-related son.

**Baby Yun cockblock his parents……*

Gu Shen sat at the edge of the bed, reached out his hand, and poked his son's chubby face. After a while, he found that it's soft and tender; feeling a little addicted, he continued to poke. At last, the child was disturbed; little Gu Yun unconsciously shrank into the quilt and his face wrinkled, the expression appeared as if he was going to cry.

The princess caught Marquis Gu's vile hand: "What kind of father are you; if he wakes up and causes troubles, will you coax him? "

"Still crying and causing troubles, how old is he already? Does he still need someone to coax him?" Gu Shen raised both of his long eyebrows, saying with dissatisfaction, "This child is too delicate."

Despite his words, his hand covered Gu Yun's forehead very gently then blocked his eyes, so that he would not be disturbed by the faint light of the steam lamp. The Marquis of Order's hand was broad and stable, his palm warm; Gu Yun soon stopped tossing and slept soundly under his hand.

"Then what are you doing?" The princess chuckled.

"I just don't have the mind to listen to this little brat being noisy," Gu Shen explained with a dry cough, unwittingly exposing himself.

The princess patted her son over the quilt and asked, "How is the situation in the Northern Frontier?"

"With me and the Black Iron Camp here, how else can it be? Don't worry." Gu Shen showed a kind of proud smile on his face. He stretched his legs and laid them flat on the bed. Compared with that, he found that Gu Yun, who was huddled in the quilt, was not half as long as his legs.

His train of thoughts ran astray: "This kid, after being born for that long yet still so small."

Judging from the appearance, little Gu Yun was a replica of the princess. Gu Shen watched his sleeping face, his expression slightly moved, then his eyes softened. He said, "If you think that staying in the capital is troublesome, you can follow me after the new year. The Northern Frontier is far away from the emperor, even eating rice bran and vegetables is carefree."

Princess: "Then what about Xiao Shiliu?"

"Take him with you, to avoid having no one in the capital that has the guts to manage him," Gu Shen caressed his son's hair and sighed. "This little boy, he really knows how to grow up. Every part of him resembles you, causing me to be reluctant and lenient when I want to discipline him."

Princess: "..."

Even she didn't really want to know what is the standard for Marshal Gu's leniency.

Gu Shen thought about it, stretched himself out, then leaned on the edge of the bed and said to the princess: "The Sixteen Kingdoms of the Western Regions have surrendered, the Dong Ying invaders in the East Sea are out of shape, and now the Barbarians in the Northern Frontier have bowed their heads. At present, it could be said that we will finally have ten years of peace ahead. I want to take advantage of these ten years to recuperate, to train the army, and expand the Black Iron Camp. Ten years later, no one in the world would dare to challenge Great Liang's Cavalry — Tong'er, when that time comes, we will return the Black Tiger emblem to the emperor. What do you think?"

The princess looked at him smilingly: "Is Marshal going to retire and do farming? No, I don't know how to weave. You will have to marry a little concubine who can weave. "

Gu Shen reached out his finger and poked her forehead. Then, the gentle smile on his face converged a little. He said again: "People of high status cannot hold power too large; if the foreign enemies are eliminated yet we still hold on to the Black Tiger emblem, we cannot help but be easily blamed for everything we do.

I think our Xiao Shiliu is not any kind of an extraordinarily talented individual. If you and I take a step back, his path will be more spacious in the future...what are you looking at me for?"

Princess: "I am looking at a father's loving heart from the Marshal whose heart is rumored to have been cast from iron."

Gu Shen coughed with embarrassment and raised his hand to turn off the steam lamp. "It's getting late. Let's sleep now — move this meatball further in."

"Slow down. Don't press on him."

"Let's throw this kid out the window!"

(III)

Gu Yun shuddered fiercely and woke up from his dream. There was a hand covering his eyes, blocking the subtle light beside him. For a moment, Gu Yun was at a loss and did not know what time it was.

At this time, the person next to him complained in a low voice: "Finally woke up, you already slept past dinner. Get up and drink a bowl of hot soup. What would you like to eat for breakfast?"

Gu Yun just returned to his senses, he closed his eyes slightly, and answered lazily, "Whatever is fine."

This was the third year of Tai Shi's reign. Gu Yun patrolled the southwest. In order to return in time to celebrate the new year, he had not stopped his riding and flew back to the capital in the large

kite all night. Overly exhausted, after he got home, he immediately fell asleep. It was almost dusk when he woke up. Somehow, he dreamt of his father. In his dream, the old Marquis even used his hand to cover the light for him.

Only when he woke up did he find that it was only a dream. Such a thoughtful person can only be his emperor. Now, he had been holding the Black Iron Tiger emblem for many years. His hands were full of calluses and scars. He was no longer the kid who tried his best to get into his mother's room.

Gu Yun grabbed Chang Geng's hand and put it in front of his eyes. One could see some characteristics of a martial artist from His Majesty's hand, there were some marks created by the bowstring grinding on his fingers. However, in daily life, he spent more time holding a pen. His fingers were long, slender, and pleasing to the eye, but his palm was a little cold. It's different from the hand of the man in his dream. He did not understand why it would cause him such a strange dream.

Chang Geng held the memorial in his hand, leaned over to rub his chin against Gu Yun's head, and asked in a whisper, "What's the matter?"

"Nothing," Gu Yun replied as if nothing was wrong. "I haven't touched your Majesty's dragon claws for a long time, I missed them very much."

The old Marquis blocked the light for him with his hand?

It truly was a wistful dream.

However, this matter continued to stay in his mind. Maybe it was because he slept too much in the daytime, Gu Yun could not close his eyes at night. He held Chang Geng in one hand and put one hand behind his head. In the quiet night, he let his thoughts run away aimlessly.

His parents passed away too early; Gu Yun found that he could no longer remember the princess's appearance clearly, yet he had a deeper impression of the old Marquis. Maybe it was because he

always stared at his father angrily at that time.

For a time, the pair of father and son were like enemies. The old Marquis showed no mercy to him, while he held on to his breath and refused to plead in any case, as if that would be admitting a loss.

"What are you thinking about?" Chang Geng suddenly moved and asked in a low voice with a little nasal sound.

"Did I wake you up?" Gu Yun raised his hand and swept his sideburns, pressing his finger on his temple.

Gu the Love Expert couldn't say "thinking about my father" in his lover's bed. After a pause, he whispered: "I'm thinking, Your Majesty, are you exhausted by the daily tasks recently? How could you be so obedient tonight? "

Gu Yun, after all, partially occupied the status of an elder; although their relationship has changed, on the aspect of feelings for Chang Geng, love and protectiveness were always more significant than any others. In some matters, as a yifu, no matter how shameless he was, it was not convenient for him to actively initiate too much. In addition to the occasional teasing, he basically allowed Chang Geng to do whatever he wanted.

Chang Geng recognized the implication of his words and immediately woke up. Two bright eyes stared at him for a while, his face changed gradually.

However, he immediately thought of something and restrained himself, held his breath, and checked Gu Yun's pulse for a moment, then he gritted his teeth, determined to hold back, "You have been exhausted traveling such a far distance. Already teasing me as soon as you return, are you trying to make yourself sick?"

Gu Yun: "I want you."

Chang Geng's scalp was a little numb. He tried his best to squeeze out a sentence: "I don't want to."

"Oh?" Gu Yun paused and asked innocently, "Then where are you rubbing?"

Chang Geng: "Shut up and go to sleep! "

(IV)

"Shut up and go to sleep!" Gu Shen had two green tendons on his forehead, he truly wanted to throw the meatball out of his bed instantly.

Since Gu Yun's birth, the first princess had not been in good health. She always got sick when the new season comes. It wasn't a severe illness, but for fear that it would be contagious towards young children, she did not allow Gu Yun to stay in her room. In order to set a fair example for her son, she even chased out General Gu, who was charging in to join her.

**Cockblock, the sequel*

The child who was blocked at the door stood on tiptoes against the window, staring into the princess's room with big eyes. Gu Shen's heart softened for a moment and brought him back to his place,...which he regretted right now.

"Will you sleep or not?"

Gu Yun arched back and forth in the quilt, then showed his head and looked at him. He bared his small baby teeth and smiled at him. He was not at all afraid of the fearsome Marshal Gu.

"All right." Gu Shen pressed the cub back and patted him, "How does your mother coax you to sleep?"

"Singing!" said little Gu Yun.

Gu Shen: "Don't talk nonsense. Your mother can't sing at all."

Even as his lie was seen through, the little boy did not appear guilty. He was still thrilled to try to break away from Marshal Gu's iron hand and tried to climb around.

Gu Shen was surprised. He studied the young boy for a moment. Before all his baby teeth had grown, he already dared to fool his father, lying without blushing, and he's also not afraid of him; his

guts were tremendous.

Gu Shen coaxed, "Be good, and I will tell you a story."

When Gu Yun heard this, he went to the pillow to lie down, staying very obediently still.

Gu Shen hesitated for a moment with a blank face and said stiffly, "Once upon a time, there was a pup… a little puppy... "

How could Marshal Gu know how to tell a serious story? He racked his brain and made one up himself, telling it in a very lifeless tone, like an old monk chanting sutras. His own recital even lulled himself to sleep, Gu Yun got bored after a while and began to crawl around once again. Gu Shen raised his hand and slapped him on the bottom: "Be still!"

Gu Yun turned angrily and sat up, about to shake heaven and earth with his cry. Gu Shen looked at him without reacting and was surprised to find that the little thing was very observant. Seeing that the usual trick he used to deal with his mother didn't work, he immediately held back his tears and no longer pretended for even the slightest.

Gu Yun: "I'm going to tell mom!"

Gu Shen raised his eyebrows and said, "Whatever, your mother is my wife. You can try and see whose side she will take."

What did "wife" mean? Little Gu Yun didn't understand it very well, but he felt that what the other said was reasonable. His tiny face sulked, no longer saying anything.

Gu Shen's intuition told him that this little thing will not cease. Maybe it's another kind of "mind link" between father and son. He suddenly became interested and wanted to know how the cub was going to deal with him, he used "force" to wrap Gu Yun in the quilt and hold him under his arm. He then closed his eyes and pretended to sleep.

Gu Yun was good for a while — more patient than Gu Shen imagined. Then he tried to struggle slightly a few times. Seeing that

Gu Shen didn't respond, he came up to investigate whether he was asleep. The child's thin and soft breath sprayed on his face, giving him the urge to laugh. He thought to himself, "So sneaky, are you going to draw something on my face?"

Gu Yun observed his father for a while, then called out softly like a kitten, "Are you asleep?"

Gu Shen kept his eyes closed and pretended he was sleeping.

Gu Yu gave a sly smile. He quickly got out of the quilt and climbed to the end of the bed. He suddenly put out his paws and tickled Marshal Gu's foot. After Gu Shen bounced up, he slipped out of the bed and got under it.

Gu Shen: "..."

He found that he had underestimated this round meatball. He didn't do anything childish like painting on someone's face. At one glance, he saw that Gu Shen only wanted to sleep, thus he went straight for the main point — and did not let him sleep.

He especially waited for him to fall asleep to give him a "fatal blow", even preparing the escape route beforehand!

Gu Shen pulled up his sleeve and jumped out of bed, squatting on the ground: "You come out here for me!"

Gu Yun moved to a deeper place under the bed and made a face at him!

In the middle of the night, the commander of the Black Iron Camp crouched on the ground in a single coat, struggling back and forth with his little son, who was a few years old, across the bed board: "Are you coming out or not?"

Gu Yun shook his head happily.

Gu Shen wanted to laugh from anger, he waved to Gu Yun and coaxed him in a soft voice: "Come out, dad will tell you a story."

When Gu Yun heard this, he poked his head forward and was

almost coaxed out. Unexpectedly, he changed his mind and looked at Gu Shen suspiciously: "You will hit me!"

He even knew how to negotiate terms, Gu Shen said with a smile, "I won't. Come here."

Gu Yun was relieved hearing this and began to climb out. Half of the way, there was no telling what he thought of, but the little boy stopped, "I don't believe you!"

He was not easy to fool.

Gu Shen put his itchy palm behind him and said like a wolf, "I promise not to hit you, if I do, your father will become…that puppy."

Gu Yun thought back and forth with his young and inexperienced brain, then finally accepted this condition and was cheated by his father. Gu Shen picked him up like an eagle catching a chicken, saying with a grim smile, "You dirty monkey, dad is not beating you, just patting the dirt off for you."

A moment later, Gu Yun was crying from his father's hands.

Gu Shen once again wrapped the kid with the quilt and put him aside, he then reviewed the whole process of fighting for wisdom and courage. Suddenly, he thought that his little boy was quite a talent worth nurturing. So he raised his hand and patted the round meatball's head who was still sniffling: "I'll tell you a story, do you want to listen?"

Gu Yun poked his head out, his eyes full of tears, staring at him with distrust.

Gu Shen stopped his words then slowly said: "I will tell you the story of Great Liang's battle in the Northern Frontier."

"What is Great Liang?" Gu Yun asked with a choked-up voice.

"In Great Liang, there are many passes in the north; in the west, there are a hundred thousand mountains; the south runs long towards the far island; in the East, there is a vast blue sea. From the East to the west, it takes a long time to travel on a horse. The customs are

quite different. Civilians live in different places, from south to north, everyone enjoys peace..."

He no longer spoke in a dry tone. Although Gu Yun did not understand everything, he still listened carefully and no longer played tricks.

Gu Shen: "Do you know what civilians are?"

Gu Yun hesitated and shook his head.

"It's thousands of men like your father, women like your mother, children like you, and old people like Uncle Wang." Gu Shen said, "the place where we live together is called Great Liang. We have a lot of good things here. The silk we wear, the steam carriage we ride when we go out, and even a plate full of….what do you like to eat?"

Gu Yun said, "Meat."

Gu Shen: "..."

The child has no ambitions.

"But there is a place where there's a group of people whose appearance is slightly different from us. They are poor. There is also meat, but not enough to fill the stomach, a lot of it is air-dried." Gu Shen opened Gu Yun's mouth, looked at his row of delicate baby teeth, and shook his head contemptuously. "Anyway, you might not be able to chew them. And it is always not enough. There is no food nor the snacks and candy you eat daily. They are hungry every day. Do you know what hunger is?"

Gu Yun's expression was in awe; obviously, he didn't know.

"So they often exchange food with us." Gu Shen said, "but as it continued, they were not satisfied. They think we give them too little, so they send people to rob them."

Gu Yun's eyes widened, he curled up and hugged one corner of the quilt nervously, as if he was afraid of being robbed of his meat and candy.

Gu Shen said, "That's why Great Liang needs iron armor and someone like your father to keep one side peaceful."

Gu Yun blinked: "Peace?"

Gu Shen picked him up and put him on his own chest. His chest was broad and firm; his heart beats steadily and slowly. He patted Gu Yun on the back and told the child what was called "peace" and "the Black Iron Camp".

He talked about the roaring Heavy Armor, the Eagle that cut the sky, the Light Armor that covered thousands of miles in a day, and how the Black Iron's three armies crossed the northern borders to make wolves bow down.

There was no telling when Gu Yun had fallen asleep. Gu Shen opened his eyes and looked at him. He saw that there was still some redness in the corner of his eyes. A paw grabbed the fabric on his chest, as if wanting to put it into his mouth.

Gu Shen couldn't help thinking, *"If you are ambitious, the world will be at peace for another generation."*

Then, he felt that he had placed such a big hope on this round meatball, which was a little wistful. He laughed at himself, raised his hand to turn out the steam lamp, and thought to himself, *"Well, let's go with the flow."*

At least for this moment, Gu Shen of iron blood was still with a coddling and indulgent heart, and wanted his only little son to grow up carefree.

(V)

After the imperial court dismissed, Gu Yun went to neither the Northern Camp nor Ling Shu Institute, but returned to the Marquis's manor and went to his house's arena.

"What is the Marquis looking for?" Uncle Wang asked.

"A Wind Slasher… actually, it was only a stick." Gu Yun moved past the group of iron puppets at the yard to walk inside.

The Gu family has given birth to military generals for ages. At Gu Shen's generation, it had reached the point where he could hold the Black Iron emblem, his status was equal to that of royalty. His power and reputation have reached the highest. In the arsenal, there were legendary weapons accumulated through generations of his ancestors. Upon entering the door, there was an unspeakable awe-inspiring aura. Inside, there were many simple and old swords and blades, while those outside were more or less reinforced with fire engines. Among the weapons collected here, some have drunk countless blood, and those that have never been used, they were all on display quietly, dignified and ferocious.

Uncle Wang called several family servants to carry out a big box to Gu Yun. "What kind of Wind Slasher are you looking for? We have everything here."

"One that is less than a foot long," Gu Yun thought that Uncle Wang had watched him grow up, there was nothing to be embarrassed about, and laughed again. "Actually, it's not really a Wind Slasher, just an imitation, it was hollow inside, for children to play with… cough, I just suddenly remembered it is all. It's alright if we can't find it, perhaps it has been lost for a long time now."

Uncle Wang made an 'Ah' in response and slowly said: "That one, of course, it is still here, wait for me to find it for you."

He ordered people to move the ladder, placed it against the wooden cabinet with a lot of bows on display, then intended to climb up himself. Gu Yun hurriedly stopped the trembling elderly man: "Let me, please slow down."

"On the top of the cupboard, there is a small box," said Uncle Wang. "All of the Marquis's playthings when you were a child are in there."

Gu Yun climbed up the ladder according to his words and found an iron box on top of the wooden cabinet. He brushed the thick dust on it and opened it. He saw that there was a set of small toys like

armor, helmets, and wrist guards, which were not made of black iron. They were light and delicate. Gu Yun never knew that he had these toys when he was a child. He was stunned for a long time and couldn't remember when he had them.

Besides those, there were other toys such as slingshots, steam-powered ponies, and other things children played with in the box, as well as a "Wind Slasher" less than a foot long.

Gu Yun carefully took out the hollow Wind Slasher. It seemed too thin for him, it could be held by his two fingers. He could hardly feel the weight in his hand. He wiped the dust off its tail with his fingers, and the two clear handwriting of "Gu Yun" appeared, followed by smaller letters, which said "Xiao Shiliu". It's not the kind of writing that he's used to, which deliberately pursued elegance. It's deeply engraved, not flashy, it appeared even slightly surly.

The soldiers of Black Iron Camp each had their own name engraved on the Wind Slasher. Gu Yun thought that he was the only one who did not, but his name was here.

He was stunned. This was the real evidence, which proved that his faint and hazy memories were all true. He looked at it, and suddenly a scene came to his mind...

(VI)

Little Gu Yun stood on tiptoe and held on to a man's arm. The man's strength was very great, even while carrying him, his hand holding the knife didn't even shake. He carved the two words "Gu Yun" in one stroke, then showed it to him: "I have carved the name, this is now yours."

The little boy didn't know the characters yet. He spread his fingers and counted the characters carefully: "Xiao - Shi - Liu, ah?"

It seems like one word is missing.

Gu Shen laughed and said, "It says 'Gu Yun.' Son, engraving Xiao Shiliu on the Wind Slasher, do you want to be laughed to death by the enemy on the battlefield?"

Gu Yun didn't understand what he was laughing at. He thought and said: "Gu Yun is alright. I wanted to carve Xiao Shiliu as well."

On that day, Marshal Gu's laughter could be heard across the courtyard.

(VII)

"This is what the old Marquis ordered from Ling Shu Institute," Uncle Wang squinted at the hollow iron bar in Gu Yun's hand, "Except that there is no inner core, the shell is minimized according to the real Wind Slasher."

Gu Yun caressed the old thing carefully, not saying a single word.

All he had of his father was hardness and ruthlessness. The sword that was put into his hand since childhood had been used to kill people. The iron puppets who accompanied him to practice sword could really break his bones, or even kill him.

Uncle Wang whispered: "The world had forced his hands, the old Marquis couldn't help it. Please don't blame him."

If this was said to Gu Yun twenty years ago, he would not be able to understand it, even if one broke up each word and tried to explain it to him. Now, as he had grown to his father's age, even just hearing a sigh, he could understand the cause.

Gu Shen wanted to help make the world peaceful and give up power while at his highest point. However, Emperor Yuan He was entranced by the beauty of the Man consort and was full of suspicion about the master of the Black Iron Tiger emblem.

The word "love" was deeply affecting: it can make a beast's heart soften, the god of ferocity bend over to smell flowers, make thousands of fearless people walk forward, and make cowards all the more extreme and insane.

Emperor Yuan He was too impatient that he didn't even want to wait until the country was at peace like what Gu Shen dreamed of. Ever since he ignored all ancestral customs to make the Barbarian

goddess a royal consort, everything became abnormal. Immediately after, the emperor had tried to take back the military authority several times. All the cowards in the court could detect his intention and followed suit...

Until the Black Iron Camp incident.

Gu Shen had to become hard-hearted to his spoiled son again, for he had predicted the chaos in the near future, or perhaps he had foreseen his own end. He must force a survival path for Gu Yun, for the Black Iron Camp, for the Gu family, and for Great Liang itself.

If he were to change places with the old Marquis...Gu Yun shook his head, unable to figure out whether he could have the heart to be ruthless. He carefully put the Wind Slasher back to the box, suddenly reminded of a chat he had with Chang Geng.

(VIII)

"Me? When I was a child, I was not afraid of my father. The only thing I'm afraid of is that I won't be able to win against him." Gu Yun frowned in confusion and said to Chang Geng, "A little woman like Hu Ge Er, even if she is a bit vicious, you were already taller than her when you were twelve or thirteen. What's there to be afraid of?"

Chang Geng thought about it and said, "Maybe I'm different from you?"

"Well, when you were a child, you always overthought and had a soft temperament." Gu Yun suddenly remembered and asked, "Are you afraid of me?"

"What?" Chang Geng was surprised at first, then laughed, "How can I be afraid of you?"

I can't even spend enough time thinking about how to take care of you.

Gu Yun said with discontent, "Compared with Hu Ge Er, I could be considered to be a strict father, right? In your eyes, this Marshal is not as powerful as a Barbarian woman as small as a palm?

Chang Geng said with a smile, "Even if you have the ability to fly to the sky and hide from the earth, you won't harm even one strand of my hair. How powerful can you be? No child is afraid of the people who love them."

No child is afraid of the people who love them.

Gu Yun thought about Chang Geng's words, and something in his heart suddenly broke.

He used to think that when facing something strong, he would become stronger, and that was why he had never feared his father. But as it turned out, at a place where his deepest memory had been blurred, there stood a Wind Slasher without a core, withstanding heaven and earth to protect him.

"Tch." Gu Yun jumped down from the ladder rather gloomily. "I know. This year's Qingming Festival, I'll personally burn paper money for him."